



BANKIM CHANDRA CHATTERJI



*BUILDERS OF MODERN INDIA*

# BANKIM CHANDRA CHATTERJI

**S. K. BOSE**

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## ABOUT THE SERIES

The object of this series is to record, for the present and future generations, the story of the struggle and achievement of the eminent sons and daughters of India who have been mainly instrumental in our national renaissance and the attainment of independence. Except in a few cases, such authoritative biographies have not been available.

The biographies are planned as handy volumes written by knowledgeable people and giving a brief account, in simple words, of the life and activities of the eminent leaders and of their times. They are not intended either to be comprehensive studies or to replace the more elaborate biographies.

The work of writing these lives has to be entrusted to different people. It has, therefore, not been possible to publish the biographies in a chronological order. It is hoped, however, that within a short period all eminent national personalities will figure in this series.

SHRI R. R. DIWAKAR is the General Editor of the series.



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## Rebirth of Spirit

**B**ANKIM CHANDRA CHATTERJI was one of the most notable Indians of the 19th century. A writer by choice and temperament, he was one of those remarkable personalities whose thoughts and ideas had a great impact on the evolution of modern India.

As a writer Bankim wielded a powerful pen and enriched his mother tongue, Bengali, with his profuse literary creations. What was more important, he imparted to the language dignity and new values which lifted it out of the rut of decadence it had fallen into. As editor of his famous Bengali journal, the *Bangadarshan*, he functioned as the fountain-head of the neo-Bengali literary renaissance of the 19th century.

Bankim started his life as a pure artist, little aware of the more important role awaiting him later in his career. Initially his purpose evidently was to write beautiful stories to provide pleasure to their readers. His stories reflected the young artist's delight in creating forms of beauty out of the wealth of his imagination. With maturity, however, the thinker in Bankim started emerging, gradually investing him with the role of a constructive patriot.

Bankim's literary career is the story of a progressive transition from the plane of pure art to a prophetic plane. From a mere writer he turned out to be, what Aurobindo called, "a seer and nation-builder".\* It takes both the men of action and of contemplation to take their country on to the path of progress and enlightenment. It is upon the thoughts and ideas of the thinking man that the men of action, the political leaders and social reformers, act to bring about useful changes in society. A nation must first be born in the ideas and imagination before it is born in the

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\*Bankim, *Tilak*, *Dayananda*

world of fact. Far removed from the scene of moving action or exciting events, a few quiet men of contemplation supply the motive force for social dynamism. There were books that shook the world and thus made history—Rousseau's *Social Contract* or Mrs Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In the same way, though on a smaller dimension, Bankim's *Anandamath* (*The Abbey of Bliss*), which contains his immortal *Vande Mataram* song, roused the country and brought about an upheaval.

That, however, was not all. At a time when slavish imitation of the West was the order of the day and the country's heritage and culture stood greatly devalued, Bankim contributed significantly to the growth of a national feeling and a sense of pride in the country's past. Indeed the entire body of his thought representing constructive patriotism of a high order had had a highly stimulating effect upon the society lying lifeless and decadent under foreign rule. Bankim was not a politician like Surendra Nath Banerjee or a social reformer like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, his two illustrious contemporaries. His field of activity was different. He functioned in the delicate sphere of thought and emotion. He moved and moulded people through his writings.

Bankim's literary career took shape against a complex background. Politically it was an era of imperial consolidation and, simultaneously, also of the growth of national consciousness. As a teen-age boy he witnessed the uprising of 1857 and matured and had his bearing in the post-Mutiny India brought completely under the British Crown.

But, side by side, political consciousness was crystallising. Dating from the days of Ram Mohan Roy, the early glimmer of political consciousness had been gradually taking shape. In 1843, the Bengal British India Society was established with the purpose of promoting welfare of inhabitants of all the British territories in India. It was followed by the establishment of the British Indian Association in 1851, on the eve of the renewal of the Company's Charter. Political consciousness was throbbing through the thinking of the English educated elite, mostly the products of the Hindu College, Calcutta, established in 1817, and through the writings in the growing Indian Press. Between 1867 and 1881, an enthusiastic patriot, Nabagopal Mitra, also known as "National Nabogopal", organised sessions of what is known as Hindu Mela or Chaitra Mela, which helped spread patriotic feelings and sentiments on a wide scale. In 1876 came the Indian Association, in many ways, the fore-

most political organisation of the rising educated middle class. The Civil Service and Ilbert Bill agitations and the widespread resentment against the Vernacular Press Act formed an exciting background to the period when Bankim was at the height of his literary career.

The socio-cultural background is also worth considering. With the British dominance firmly established on the Indian soil, the country was in a state of utter decadence, socially, politically and economically. Worst of all, there was stagnation in the mental and moral spheres, and cultural decay was inevitable under such conditions. But as English education spread, a new spirit began to animate the society. While the country's material conditions remained unchanged, indeed worsened, there was a great rebirth of spirit in other spheres. It may be noted that even before the Government accepted Macaulay's famous Minute of 1835, English education had started spreading in Bengal with the Hindu College as the nucleus. It received a considerable boost from the new educational policy of 1835 and from the establishment of the three universities at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras later in 1857.

The spread of English education had some striking effects, specially on the socio-religious and cultural spheres. Western education broke down narrow walls and replaced blind acceptance by a spirit of rational questioning. It shook people's faith in the existing beliefs and traditions and set in motion a process of drastic reassessment of values. The elite group known as the Young Bengal rebelled against the existing socio-religious tradition, specially under the inspiration of the Hindu College teacher, Derozio, and indulged in iconoclastic excesses.

The first most important effect of the Western impact was a vigorous socio-religious reformation starting with Ram Mohan Roy. The Brahmo Samaj in its different phases under Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore (father of poet Rabindranath Tagore) and Keshab Chandra Sen represented the reformist urge in its varying aspects. The movements since the days of Ram Mohan had been West-inspired, they aimed at recreating the Indian society after Western image. The idea of an Indian society approximating to European standards was present in Ram Mohan's mind.

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar too breathed in the atmosphere of early reformist ferment, having had close associations with the Brahmos. Belonging to an orthodox Brahmin family, he rose far above th



immediate environment of Hindu orthodoxy to lead some of the most radical movements of the day, though from within the Hindu fold

In western India too the leaven of English education created a similar ferment. There, liberal social reform movements began effectively in the sixties of the last century. Under the influence of the Brahmo Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj was established in 1867 by Dr. Atmaram Pandurang which was later joined by Ranade and Bhandarkar. Like Vidyasagar in Bengal, Ranade was the focal point of western India's social reform movement.

All these may be said to constitute the rational-liberal phase of the Indian renaissance with pronounced Western overtones and the reformers drawing largely upon Western ideals to reconstruct the society. Even though there was no wholesale rejection of the East, there was also no uncritical acceptance of Hindu beliefs and customs as such. The age-old religious traditions and injunctions were being scattered to the winds by the new spirit of enquiry generated by the inflow of Western rationalism.

A reaction against this headlong rush towards Westernism was inevitable, and it was not long before it set in with great vigour. It was Western education which swept the educated elite off their Indian moorings at the earlier stage of the evolution. But it was the same Western education again which generated among the people a sense of pride in India's past which was being revived and reconstructed through the labours of the European orientalists and their Indian counterparts. The Hindu faith, till then subjected to virulent attacks, specially by the Christian missionaries, began to assert itself. The West-inspired reform movements came under a sudden check by a zealous defence of the old faith. The Arya Samaj, the Ramkrishna Paramahansa movement and the Theosophical Society, all tended, in their own ways, to help the revival of the Hindu faith and culture. Noticeably, the tremendous enthusiasm generated by Vidyasagar's widow-remarriage movement in the fifties gradually fell off by the seventies, while his movement against polygamy simply did not catch on. The mood of the country was changing. A new note of "assertive Hinduism" was heard above the voice of rationalism.\* This was the second phase of the renaissance, its emotional-revivalist phase, and it was in full swing. Its political counterpart, that

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\**History of the Freedom Movement*, Vol. 2, Dr. Tarachar.

is, extremism, was due to appear still later in the country

Bankim Chandra belonged to the second phase of the renaissance. But, however strong the urge for a revival of the past might have been, a complete rejection of the West was plainly not possible. The spirit of Western culture and rationalism had gone deep into the various strata of the educated society broadening outlook and weakening the hold of traditional beliefs and customs. A complete return to the pristine past was thus not within the realm of feasibility. The past-oriented intellectuals, therefore, sought their way out of the dilemma through a rationalised approach to the ancient faith in the light of the ideas gleaned from the West. Bankim represented one of the finest fruits of this synthesis of Eastern spirit with Western rationalism. Steeped initially in the European philosophies of utilitarianism and positivism, Bankim himself applied Western methodology to his reinterpretation of Hinduism. He solved the dilemma inherent in the age by seeking to reconcile the Western spirit of enquiry with Eastern faith. In thus reinterpreting Hinduism, he however, brought out its liberal-universal essence, correlating it with the new thought currents of the age, including those pertaining to the society and the nation.

Another important effect of the Western impact was an enrichment of the vernacular languages and literature. The Indian renaissance was an all-pervasive one covering not only society and religion but literature and culture as well, as it happened during the European renaissance. When Bankim appeared on the literary scene, blind imitation of the West, immortally caricatured in some of his lighter works, was very pronounced in the educated society. What was worse was the contempt in which the Bengali language and literature was held by the English-educated sections of the society.

Doubtless, the Bengali literature was stagnating and was in a state of decadence. But with the inflow of Western ideas the tide had started turning. Devoted efforts were being made to lift the mother-tongue out of the neglect into which it had fallen. The base of the Bengali literature's remarkable recovery was built by the Serampore missionaries, the Fort William College group of writers, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Devendra Nath Tagore, Akshay Kumar Dutta, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and others. Bankim's senior contemporary, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, made new beginnings in Bengali poetry by introducing epics in blank

verse on the Western model and thus facilitated its magnificent transition from the medieval to the modern age

Bankim himself made most significant contribution to this literary revival. He was indeed, as B C Pal says, "the prophet of this renaissance" \* R C Dutt, a Civilian, a former Congress President and a writer of no mean calibre, nicely locates the place of Bankim in the literary evolution of that period \*\*. Ram Mohan reigned supreme from 1815 to 1830 and Vidyasagar till 1872. Dinabandhu Mitra and Michael shared the reign with Vidyasagar. While Vidyasagar abdicated, both Michael and Dinabandhu died in 1873, leaving Bankim the undisputed master of the literary scene.

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\* *My Life and Times*

\*\* *Cultural Heritage of Bengal*

## The Early Years

**B**ANKIM CHANDRA came of a respectable Brahmin family settled in Kanthalpara, a place near the Naihati station of the Eastern Railway and about an hour's journey from Calcutta by train. There Bankim was born on June 26, 1838\*. In that suburban locality one can even now see his dilapidated ancestral dwelling flanked by a small museum housed in what used to be his study.

Those days there were no railways in that area. Communication was poor and undeveloped. People had either to walk long distances or to cover the same by boat and palanquin. Kanthalpara was like any other village with a purely rural setting. There, Bankim was born in a family fairly well off and commanding respect in society.

Not too far away from Bankim's residence there was a tank named Arjuna which had come to have something like a mythical awe. The story goes that young Bankim had laid out a beautiful garden on its bank where he used to spend his time in flights of fancy. The tank reminds one of the Baruni tank, the romantic rendezvous of Govindalal and Rohini, in his famous novel *Krishnakanter Will*.

Nearby flowed a canal whose course lay through thick jungles where Bankim used to roam about, regardless of the presence of serpents and wild animals. Bankim's love for nature was manifest even in his boyhood. The idyllic background of Kanthalpara apparently provided him with lot of literary inspiration.

Bankim's ancestors had migrated from the Hooghly district on the western bank of the Ganga and settled down in Kanthalpara on its eas-

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\* In his *Bankim Jivani*, Shachish Chandra Chatterji, Bankim's nephew, mentions June 27 as the date of his birth.

tern bank His father, Jadav Chandra Chatterji, began his service career in Orissa and rose to the position of a Deputy Collector in 1838, when Bankim was born

There is a strange story told about Jadav Chandra When about 13 years of age, Jadav fled away from his home and reached Orissa where his elder brother was then in service There he fell so seriously ill that every body gave up hope of his life and took him to the riverside for cremation Meanwhile an awe-inspiring *Sannyasi* (an ascetic) appeared on the scene and ordered the cremation to be stopped Through his miraculous power Jadav Chandra came back to life and afterwards received sacred initiation from his life-saver (The same *Sannyasi* is believed to have visited him again shortly before his death) This episode is important not only because it shows the Chatterji family's mystic association with *Sannyasis* but also because Bankim's own sensitive mind was greatly influenced by them His personal experience of a *Kapalik Sannyasi* (a particular class of Tantrik ascetics) will be recalled in a later chapter

The awe emanating from *Sannyasis* never really left Bankim's mind throughout his life Indeed, *Sannyasis* figure prominently in some of his novels also

The Chatterjis seem to have been a family of Deputy Magistrates As was his father, Bankim himself also became a Deputy Magistrate His two elder brothers, Shyama Charan and Sanjib Chandra, were Deputy Magistrates too, although the latter held the position only for a short time His younger brother, Purna Chandra, also was a Deputy Magistrate So many Deputy Magistrates in a single family was a striking coincidence

Deputy Magistrateship was, in fact, the highest office to which Indians could aspire in those days of colonial subjugation Even a highly talented person like Bankim was not rewarded with a promotion above the rank of a Deputy Magistrate and Deputy Collector, although his services were much appreciated by his British superiors The Proclamation of 1857 had, theoretically, thrown open the Indian Civil Service to all the natural born subjects of Her Majesty But owing to various bureaucratic manipulations the Service remained virtually beyond the reach of the Indians for a long time It was only in 1863 that the first Indian, Satyendra Nath Tagore, could enter the portals of the heaven-born Service The reduction in the age-limit to appear for the Civil Service Examination was apparently intended to discourage the

entry of Indians into the Service. A strong agitation led, among others, by Surendra Nath Banerjee, was, therefore, launched by the educated classes against this arbitrary reduction in the age-limit. The Civil Service agitation, however, created a sense of national cohesion. Bankim, though himself a silent spectator to all this, could not but have been sadly disappointed when young British Civilians who had received training under him had their promotions above his rank.

Coming back to Bankim's childhood days his another point of interest was the ancestral deity, Radhaballav, whose worship the Chatterji family performed with great éclat. During the *Rathyatra* festival there used to be lot of pomp and ceremony centering round the deity. A festive fair used to be held near Bankim's ancestral house providing a lot of popular attractions, including puppetry. A free-thinker initially, Bankim, however, later became devoted to Radhaballav and for that matter to the Krishna cult.

Bankim himself has provided some glimpses of his early life in his introduction to Sanjib's works. His education began privately at home under the teacher-in-charge of the local *pathshala* (village elementary school). But he does not seem to have gained much from his rural instruction. His real education, in fact, began in 1844 in Midnapore where his father was then posted. There, in an English school, he had his lessons under the tutelage of English headmasters. In his childhood Bankim gave evidence of his extraordinary talent. He could master his lessons with astonishing intelligence and speed. This made his father particularly mindful of his education. At Midnapore, the foundation of his knowledge of English appears to have been soundly laid, at the Hooghly College where he came to study later, the foundation became sounder still. He acquired such a profound mastery over the language that in subsequent years he wrote out an entire novel, *Raj Mohan's Wife*, in English. The man who brought about a glorious revival of his mother tongue had first had his knowledge of English and, through it, of Western thoughts and ideas perfected.

After four years of schooling in Midnapore, Bankim came back to Kanthalpara. In 1849, he married a girl of five, those being the days of child marriage.

Then with his entry into the Hooghly College, one of the most well-known colleges of those days, the same year, an important stage in his

educational career was reached. Hooghly College was on the western bank of the Ganga and Kanthalpara was on its eastern bank, and Bankim used to attend the college from his village home. One can, therefore, imagine young Bankim ferrying daily across the none-too-docile river to reach the College. The colleges those days used to have a school section and a college section. The school section had several classes, junior and senior. From the junior section Bankim went up to the college stage receiving awards and distinctions. In 1854, he stood first in the Junior Scholarship Examination for 1853 and obtained a scholarship of Rs 8. In the Senior Scholarship Examination held in 1856, he received a scholarship of Rs 20 for the "highest proficiency in all subjects". During his stay at the Hooghly College, the foundation of his remarkable Sanskrit scholarship was laid through private study under well-known scholars. Acquisition of Western knowledge did not suffice for his young, inquisitive mind, and he must have inwardly felt that to satisfy his intellectual hankering he must turn to the great treasure that Sanskrit is. Delving deep equally in both modern knowledge and the ancient, he thus equipped himself for the great tasks of his life.

His stay at the Hooghly College was important from yet another point of view, for, it was at that time that his literary talent found its first flowering. Poet Ishwar Chandra Gupta was then the undisputed master of the literary scene. He was the last powerful exponent of the old school in Bengali poetry which was fast falling into decay. Poetry was awaiting the magic touch of the genius of Michael Madhusudan Dutt to be brought back to life. But poet Gupta was a powerful personality. He had two important journals, the *Sambad Prabhakara* (1831) and the *Sambad Sadhuranjan* (1847), the former was first a weekly and then a daily, while the latter was a weekly. These two journals made a great mark on the literary scene. Besides, they provided a training ground for young literary aspirants, the poet himself playing the part of a benign patron. Bankim started writing for them in 1852 when he was about 14 years of age and still at the Hooghly College. In 1853, he joined a poetry competition on the pages of the *Sambad Prabhakara* and won a cash award. The journal also encouraged what may be called the poetic duels among three very promising students of the day, Bankim Chandra of the Hooghly College, Dinabandhu Mitra of the Hindu College and Dwarka Nath Adhikari of the Krishnanagar College. In this way Bankim's genius started

finding its first adolescent expression. Bankim received a good deal of inspiration from poet Gupta. His early compositions were mostly poetical and bore evidence of Gupta's influence, despite the unmistakable promise they otherwise held forth.

Bankim's career at the Hooghly College came to an end when, in July 1856, he left it to join the Presidency College at Calcutta to study Law. At this time appeared his first book of verse, *Lalita Purakalik Galpa Thatha Manas* (*Lalita—An Old Tale—And Manas*), which however had been composed earlier in 1853. *Lalita* is in the nature of a descriptive verse tale after the old fashion, while *Manas* is a sentimental poetical piece. Bankim, however, changed over from poetry to prose after this. From 1856 to 1864 he does not appear to have done any major literary effort except writing *Raj Mohan's Wife* in English. During this period Madhusudan Dutt made his magnificent debut with his epics in blank verse. It has been suggested that Madhusudan's superior poetical talent might have eclipsed Bankim and induced him to give up poetry in favour of prose. He is also believed to have been advised by Ishwar Gupta, his patron, to take to prose. But a more plausible explanation seems to be that despite his essentially poetic nature, he might have found prose more suitable as a medium of his self-expression than poetry.

The next two years in Bankim's life were important. Established in 1857, the Calcutta University started holding the Entrance Examination from April that year. Bankim sat for it from the Law Department of the Presidency College and passed it in the first division. In 1858, the B A Examination was held for the first time with 13 candidates appearing for it. Only two of them passed, Bankim Chandra Chatterji and Jadunath Basu, who thus became the first graduates of the Calcutta University. Actually the examination was so stiff that seven grace marks had to be given to each of them to get them through. Later that year both received their degrees. Their success at the first B A Examination of the newly-started University created a tremendous enthusiasm among the educated classes.

This distinction was big enough to attract immediate official attention. Within a few months of the announcement of the B A results, he was appointed Deputy Magistrate and Deputy Collector by an order of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal and posted in Jessore (now in Bangladesh). His Law study was interrupted for the time being. But he



was not the person to give it up. He appeared for the Law Examination much later—in 1869—and passed it creditably. Evidently, Bankim had, from the beginning, the independent legal profession in view, even while accepting government service, he did not rule it out altogether. Possibly he was apprehensive that circumstances might bring him in conflict with the authorities and thus cost him his job, in which eventuality he might have to fall back upon the legal profession.

His stay at Jessore was uneventful except for two incidents. First, he got in touch with Dinabandhu Mitra, his boyhood competitor and an eminent litterateur of those days. Their friendship was deep and abiding. Secondly, during his stay at Jessore he lost his wife whom he loved dearly. The shock was great indeed but soon overcome. Early in 1860 Bankim married for the second time. On his own admission, Rajlakshmi Devi, his second wife, came to occupy a very important place in his life.

From various accounts we can have an idea of Bankim's tastes and traits in his boyhood as well as in his early youth. The well-known scholar, Hara Prasad Shastri, tells us that Bankim was keenly interested in history, specially the history of the European renaissance and looked forward to a similar resurgence in Bengal\*. He wrote a number of historical articles in the *Bangadarshan* which indicate his passion for history. Bankim continued to be fond of poetry too and could recite verses in a very attractive manner.

We are told that Bankim was quite averse to vigorous physical exercises and loved indoor habits of playing cards and music. He learnt music under the able guidance of Jadu Bhatta, a well-known musician of those days.

This, however, does not mean that Bankim was a weakling or lacked in manly qualities. Indeed, he was exceptionally fearless, his courage springing from his remarkable mental and moral strength. Once word went round that a number of European soldiers had reached Kanthalpara by boat and were camping on the river bank. Those days they used to come like that from time to time and carry on depredations in the village. Naturally the villagers took to their heels and shut themselves in their homes for fear of the soldiers, leaving the village streets deserted. Young Bankim, however, was too proud to be afraid.

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\**Narayan* (Bengali Magazine), Baishakh 1322 (B. S.)

He stood out in a challenging posture symbolically holding a cane in his hand and faced the soldiers fearlessly \*

Here is another story Bankim was then a mere stripling A warning was received that a gang of dacoits would be committing dacoity at Bankim's residence In sheer panic his elders decided to shift women and children to a neighbour's house for safety But young Bankim stood up against this He insisted that nobody should shift but that some *lathials* (experts in fighting with 'lathis' or sticks) should be engaged to face up to the dacoits This proposal sounded sensible and was accepted, and there was no trouble from dacoits There are other stories recorded about how Bankim displayed extraordinary courage by undertaking boat journeys in the Ganga under the most threatening weather conditions in utter disregard of the risk involved All these speak of his remarkable mental strength and stamina

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\**Bankim Jivani*, Shachish Chandra Chatterji and *Bankim's Childhood Stories*, Purna Chandra Chatterji, Narayan, Baishakh, 1322 (B S)

## The Administrator

**B**ANKIM BECAME Deputy Magistrate and Deputy Collector in August 1858 and thus worked for about 33 years—a period of constant transfers, tours and postings. He was posted in no less than 15 districts and sub-divisional towns of Bengal and Orissa and sometimes more than once at one place. Over and above he had to work in other capacities like Personal Assistant to Divisional Commissioners and, for a time, as Assistant Secretary to the Government of Bengal.

Bankim began his career with bright ideas largely borrowed from the West. But when in the course of his official work he came in touch with the grim realities of the situation, he could see the gaping contrast between the fine ideas derived from his studies and the deplorable conditions prevailing in his country. In the course of his administrative work, he came to be acquainted with all classes of people, particularly the poorer classes, whose sorrows, sufferings and privations left a deep impression upon his mind and made him alive to the reality. He pondered over the fallen state of his country, its problems and the possible remedies. The patriot in him gradually came out. If his wide experience of men and matters helped him in his literary creations, it also more pronouncedly brought out the patriot in him. In the midst of his multifarious official work, he never ceased writing, novels, stories, essays and satires came out in profusion from his pen. These varied and abundant literary creations gradually put on a deeper and deeper patriotic tone.

Early in 1860 Bankim was transferred from Jessore to Neguan, then a sub-division of the Midnapore district. There he had a vision of the forest-fringed sea. While living there he had frequent visits from a *Kapalik Sannyasi* who possibly lived in the thick forests on the sea coast. That sea-side scenic background associated with the *Kapalik* seems to

have provided him with the idea of writing his romantic novel, *Kapalkundala*

From there he was transferred to Khulna, then a sub-division of the Jessore district (both are in Bangla-desh now), in November 1860. About this time he had his first promotion in service, he was raised to class five rank with a pay raise.

His Khulna posting was memorable from the administrative point of view. Khulna was then in the grip of utter lawlessness. Robbery, looting and plunder were the order of the day. It being a riverine area, dacoities were a common occurrence on the far-flung waterways. The young administrator was charged with the responsibility of re-establishing law and order in a situation of near anarchy. Bankim measured up to his challenging task very well. By grappling firmly with the dacoity problem, he made the waterways safe for traffic. Young in years, he was firm and fearless so far as his duty was concerned. C. E. Buckland pays a fine tribute to his administrative ability saying that "he helped very largely in suppressing river dacoities and establishing peace and order in the eastern canals"\*. And it must be remembered that Buckland, at one time Bankim's official superior, had not been very friendly towards him.

But in Khulna a far greater challenge than that from the river desperadoes was awaiting Bankim, and that was from the European indigo planters. The indigo agitation occupies not an insignificant place in the country's political awakening. Initially indigo plantation was a staple business of the East India Company. Gradually it came into the hands of private European capitalists who acquired large areas for indigo cultivation and practically set up big zamindaris where they reigned supreme. Despotism by nature, they compelled the peasants to do indigo cultivation for them, even if it brought the latter no remuneration. They would torture, and tyrannize the unwilling peasants in every possible way. Once a peasant accepted an advance from a planter for the cultivation of indigo, he would virtually become his master's self. Harrowing tales of atrocities committed by the indigo planters on the innocent peasantry are on record. The ryots were arrested, beaten mercilessly and shut up in dungeons. Their houses were burnt and they

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\**Bengal Under the Lieutenant-Governors*, Vol. 2

were put to inhuman torture leading in some cases to death. The European planters were thus a terror to the countryside and indulged in widespread lawlessness and despotism. The system of indigo plantation was described as one based on bloodshed. It was said that not a chest of indigo reached England without being stained with blood\*. The Government was indifferent towards the peasants' suffering. It made laws which, in effect, helped the planters rather than the peasants.

The ten-year period from 1850 to 1860 was marked by widespread disturbances centering round indigo plantation. In 1859 about 50 lakh peasants rose in revolt against indigo plantation under the leadership of Rafique Mandal in North Bengal and the Biswas brothers in South Bengal. The well-known editor of the powerful *Hindu Patriot*, Harish Chandra Mukherji, passionately championed the cause of the ryots. Similarly Sisir Kumar Ghosh, founder-editor of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, lent a great support to the movement against the indigo planters when he was still in his teens. Another powerful writer created almost an upheaval. Through his moving drama *Nil Darpan* (Indigo Plantation Mirror), Dinabandhu Mitra, Bankim's friend and fellow writer, thoroughly exposed the despotism and ruthlessness of the indigo planters. So great was the impact of the book that Bankim himself, in his preface to Dinabandhu's works, calls it the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of Bengal.

Against this background Bankim was posted in Khulna. One story will suffice to show how strong and unflinching he was in dealing even with the dreaded indigo planters. There was in Bankim's jurisdiction a powerful indigo planter-cum-zamindar named Morell who was virtually ruling over the area. For some time he was not having good relations with his ryots in Barakhali village who not only resented increase in rent but also refused to do indigo cultivation for their European masters. Morell had a sort of a private army equipped with guns and *lathis* (sticks). Enraged, he sent it to Barakhali under the command of Dennis Hely, his superintendent, to teach the ryots a lesson. The villagers were taken unawares by an early morning attack. In the clash that followed Morell's better equipped men won the day. Many of the villagers died, others fled. The entire village was ransacked. Even women were not spared. On

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\**History of Indigo Disturbances in Bengal*, L. C. Mitra

receiving information, Bankim rushed to the village with a police force and issued warrants against Morell, Lightfoot (Morell's partner), Hely and their Indian followers. Morell and Lightfoot absconded and managed to flee away from the country, while Bankim had Hely arrested and put in the dock. The story goes that Morell tried, though unsuccessfully, to dissuade Bankim from pursuing the case by offering him a heavy bribe. So also a conspiracy is said to have been hatched to make an attempt on his life. But Bankim was undeterred either by temptation or by threat. The firmness and courage he thus displayed broke up the indigo planters' despotism and restored calm and confidence among the peasantry. While the rest of the Jessore district was in ferment, Khulna in Bankim's charge was quiet. His handling of the indigo situation in Khulna earned him wide appreciation. The Government rewarded him with a handsome increment and a promotion to the next higher, that is, class four, rank.

His next posting was at Baruaipur (24 Parganas district). From an insertion in the *Sambad Prabhakar* it appears that he distinguished himself there in many ways, specially by maintaining law and order and looking after the arrangements in a mela (fair). We are further told that he also earned appreciation from the public by organising relief in the cyclone-ravaged areas. He, however, was soon transferred from this place. Moni Bagchi tells a story about this \*. According to him Bankim was once holding his court in Baruaipur when a procession accompanied by music was passing that way. Being disturbed in his court work, Bankim ordered the music to be stopped. Actually the procession was sponsored by an influential local zamindar. Enraged with Bankim for stopping the procession, he somehow manipulated to have him transferred from Baruaipur. But whatever the circumstances of his early transfer might have been, the Government does not appear to have been displeased with him. He was brought back to Baruaipur after a spell and had his third promotion there. In 1866, he now rose to class three rank.

The following year he was appointed Secretary to a Commission set up with a view to fixing the pay scales of the ministerial staff. This was a highly responsible position held previously by a European judge, and

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\*Bankim Chandra

his appointment to it shows the Government's confidence in his worth and ability

After several changes he was posted in Behrampur towards the end of 1869 where he entered one of the most important phases of his life

A fact about his personal life needs mention here In 1865, a family dispute started among Bankim and his brothers over their father's proposed distribution of the Kanthalpara property. This domestic disharmony does not appear to have ended at any time later.

Details of Bankim's service career as available are meagre. But from the scanty material available it appears that he was an able executive officer and impartial magistrate and that during his long and strenuous service period, he maintained an unimpeachable record of independence, honesty and impartiality He was so conscientious that he would not even talk about court matters to anybody, including his relatives The Government too was pleased with him and rewarded him with steady promotions But his frankly honest and straight forward nature often brought him in sharp conflict with his immediate British superiors. He was so scrupulous in his duties that nobody could easily find an occasion to call him in question But he could not avoid clashes altogether with the European officers To a large extent this was due to the robust independence he tried to maintain throughout his official career and his contempt for crouching before superior authority Kalinath Datta tells us that once a British magistrate entered Bankim's court room and called him by his first name, that is, Bankim He immediately admonished the magistrate saying: "You should see I am no longer Bankim now I represent Her Majesty's law and justice You should know I can at once order your arrest and pass sufficient punishment for insulting Her Majesty's court of justice"\*

As a trying magistrate Bankim gave ample evidence of his fine sense of justice, his fairness and impartiality, as also of his compassionate heart. Those were the days of police despotism But Bankim never hesitated to pass strictures on the police whenever the latter were in the wrong He even inflicted punishment on the delinquent policemen And all this he did even at the risk of incurring the displeasure of his superiors Sturdy

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\**Pradeep*, Shravan 1306 (B S )

independence was his greatest quality. He was indeed an asset to the cadre he belonged to

But Bankim was never happy with his service. He must have been thoroughly disappointed at the way the Indians were shut out from all higher administrative positions. What was of more immediate concern to him was perhaps his feeling that his strenuous work was the cause of his health breakdown. Perhaps that was the reason why he sought premature retirement. But as long as he was in service, he never allowed any flagging of his honest zeal.



## Visions of the Past

**T**HE SPADE-WORK for the remarkable recovery of the Bengali language and literature, till then in a state of decadence, was done by the Baptist Mission at Serampore and the Pundits of the Fort William College, established by Wellesley in 1800. But the dawn of the modern Bengali literature may really be traced back to Ram Mohan Roy who, through his scriptural, polemical and journalistic writings, built the base of the Bengali prose. Ram Mohan dominated the scene from 1815 to 1830. Next to him the *Tattwabodhini Patrika* (1843) and its talented editor, Akshay Kumar Dutta (1820-1886), strengthened the foundation laid by Ram Mohan. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, who was a part of the *Tattwabodhini* milieu, imparted to the language an artistic grace till then lacking in it. Those were the days of polemics and controversies on the one hand and translations and adaptations on the other. The language was highly Sanskritised and naturally too heavy for day to day use. Vidyasagar tried to simplify it, even then his language remained by and large a Sanskritised one, known in common parlance as the "Vidyasagari style".

There was great poverty in the field of fiction. The writers contented themselves mostly with adaptations from Sanskrit, Persian and English tales. The nearest approximation to fiction were the sketches like *Naba Babu Bilas* by Pramatha Natha Sharma (1825), *Alaler Gharer Dulal* by Peary Chand Mitra (1858) and *Hutom Penchar Naksa* by Kali Prasanna Sinha (1862). Among these and other writings of their type, Mitra's *Alaler Gharer Dulal* had most of the traits of a full-fledged fiction. What was more important, it broke completely new ground by rejecting entirely the Sanskritic or "Vidyasagari" style in favour of the colloquial diction and also by drawing realistically upon the contemporary social

life In his preface to Peary Chand's works, Bankim himself pays a high tribute to him for his startling innovations Mitra did a good job by freeing the language from the shackles of a heavy and prolix diction and bringing it near to the common speech But being too near to it his language lacked elegance and dignity at many places

In poetry, Ishwar Gupta, to whom reference has already been made, was representing the old and dying order, Bankim admired Gupta's poetry because it had something of Bengal's native air about it But he was also conscious of the defects of his poetry which made many of his disciples, including Bankim himself, turn away from his tutelage. The fact is that the new age ushered in by the Western impact, was knocking at the door, and the old order could no longer hold its own, either in poetry or in prose Michael Madhusudan Dutt was the first exponent of the poetry of the new age, as Bankim was of prose fiction

Bankim began his literary career as a poet than as a prose writer But as he grew in years, two things happened—he outgrew the influence of Ishwar Gupta and gave up poetry in favour of prose That was a crucial change in him Nevertheless, his poetical instinct was genuine and is manifest in many of his works which contain some of the finest descriptions in the Bengali literature During the period from 1858 to 1864 the responsibility of his job might have been weighing too heavily on him to allow him much literary leisure Even then he wrote *Raj Mohan's Wife* in English and had it serialised in a journal called the *Indian Field* But, possibly, in comparative silence he was also making mental preparations for the great novels he was destined to write later. In fact, he is believed to have started writing *Durgeshnandini*, his first novel in Bengali, about the year 1863-64 while he was in Khulna

Bankim's urge for self-expression was obviously not satisfied through a foreign tongue Or perhaps he had realised the futility of writing in English for the purpose of artistic communication In this connection a significant episode in the life of Michael Madhusudan Dutt may be recalled here. Thoroughly anglicised and a convert to Christianity, Madhusudan began his literary career by writing verses in English His poem, *The Captive Lady*, to which was appended *The Visions of the Past*, earned well-merited appreciation When Madhusudan sent a copy of *The Captive Lady* to Drinkwater Bethune, eminent educationist and Chairman of the Council of Education, the latter gave him the advice (in 1849)

that he should employ his cultivated taste and talents to the improvement of poetry in his mother tongue. This proved to be a turning point in Madhusudan's life leading to his complete change-over to Bengali and his remarkable contribution to poetry and drama in his mother tongue. This spectacular transformation of a confirmed Anglophil might have had an effect on Bankim.

Bankim was a great admirer of the English language and literature, not only because it was a storehouse of modern knowledge but also because it was a medium of all India communication and a cementing force in a country of immense diversity. Nevertheless he gradually came to realise that the knowledge of English was confined to the upper strata of the society and that the masses could not be approached through the medium of a foreign tongue.

As already mentioned, he started writing *Durgeshnandini* while in Khulna. Its publication in 1865 took the literary world by storm and brought about an upsurge of admiration. Of course, some critics found fault with its language which, they contended, was a curious amalgam of the chaste and the colloquial dictions. But, by and large, it was acclaimed as an epoch-making novel which had opened up a new horizon in Bengali literature. Indeed, it became so popular that it went through 13 editions even in Bankim's lifetime.

*Durgeshnandini* is a romantic novel based partly on history and partly on stories current those days. Bankim is believed to have heard the story from a grand-uncle of his who lived up to the age of 108 years. The story centres round the attack on, and the occupation of, the Gar Mandaran stronghold of Raja Birendra Singh in Bishnupur (Bengal) by the Pathans who, defying the Mughals' imperial sway, have entrenched themselves firmly in Orissa. Deputed by Akbar's general, Man Singh, to bring the Pathans to bay, his heroic son, Jagat Singh, reaches there and falls in love with Birendra Singh's exquisitely beautiful daughter, Tilottama. In a secret nocturnal assault, the Pathans occupy Gar Mandaran and capture Birendra Singh, Jagat Singh and Tilottama. Birendra Singh is killed under orders of the Pathan chief, Katlu Khan. In revenge the highly resourceful Bimala, Birendra Singh's un-acknowledged wife, assassinates Katlu Khan. This makes the Pathans crestfallen. On his death-bed Katlu Khan through Jagat Singh, till then a prisoner, seeks for peace with Akbar in lieu of his children being allowed an undisputed

sway in Orissa With his death the story practically comes to a close

Within this broad political framework of the story, Bankim introduces a love tangle beautiful in its romantic wistfulness While Jagat Singh and Tilottama love each other, Ayesha, Katlu Khan's beautiful daughter, falls in love with her father's prisoner, Jagat Singh But Ayesha herself is passionately desired by the Pathan chief's general, Osman This love tangle makes the plot highly interesting and imparts the necessary human touch to the dry bones of history Rejected by Ayesha whose heart is after Jagat Singh, Osman challenges the latter to a duel, so that either of them might live to rule over Ayesha's heart, but is defeated by the Rajput hero Bimala, Birendra Singh's unrecognised wife, remains a mysterious character throughout but provides the necessary dynamism to the plot

The eminent historian, Jadu Nath Sarkar, calls *Durgeshnandini* the first real historical novel in the Bengali literature \* Not that historical accuracy in detail is Bankim's aim, but he builds up his story on the broad historical canvas of Mughal-Pathan conflict, following history in respect of the main incidents and characters And for the rest of it, Bankim's romantic imagination has had a free play, it need not be bound down by the dull dictates of history Considering that it was his first novel in Bengali, *Durgeshnandini* is a fine accomplishment Some of the characters are very interesting—Bimala, Osman and Ayesha in particular

There was a controversy those days as to whether *Durgeshnandini* was or was not an imitation of Scott's *Ivanhoe* *Durgeshnandini* certainly bears some obvious similarities to that famous English classic *Ivanhoe* and Jagat Singh, Bois Guilbert and Osman, Rowens and Tilottama, Rebecca and Ayesha—these are some obvious parallels Besides, there are similarities in circumstances as well, like the duels in both But Bankim said on more than one occasion that he had not read *Ivanhoe* before writing *Durgeshnandini*, and there is no reason to doubt the truth of this statement Besides, such similarities are not rare in the great literary works of the world and do not detract from the merit of a piece Actually the similarities are superficial. *Durgeshnandini* has been conceived in a different light and creates an entirely different emotional field Its excellence remains unaffected even if it bears some apparent resemblances to *Ivanhoe*

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\* *Bankim's Works*, Centenary Edition, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad

If there was any doubt about the novelist's art in *Durgeshnandini*, *Kapalkundala* (1866), Bankim's second novel, removed it altogether, establishing his position once for all as the maker of the modern Bengali fiction. *Kapalkundala* is more compact than *Durgeshnandini*, artistically more integrated and shorn of imaginative excesses. The problem posed in it is psycho-sociological, though this novel too has a remote historical side-plot. The *Kapalik* who visited him frequently in Neguan and his experience there of the sea-coast itself with its hill-like sand dunes and forest fringes covered with an eerie stillness form the background of *Kapalkundala*. How a girl brought up by a *Kapalik* in the dreadful desolation of a sea-side wilderness would behave once she is married and placed in the normal social context is the problem. But the problem is not obtrusive. It gets diluted in sheer artistic beauty.

The story of *Kapalkundala* briefly is thus. Nobokumar, a young man, is left alone in the ferocious wilderness of a river bank by his fellow pilgrims boating down from Ganga Sagar, the famous place of pilgrimage, where the Ganga pours out into the sea. It is a desolate place just at the mouth of the river and not too far away from the sea. Left alone and wandering in the nearby forest, Nobokumar comes upon a *Kapalik* performing his weird rites which involve human sacrifice, among other things. But Nobokumar has a most romantic surprise when he also comes across Kapalkundala, a young, innocent girl of great charm, whom the *Kapalik* is rearing up as an aid to his mystic ceremonies. While the *Kapalik* is leading Nobokumar to the riverside intending to have him sacrificed, the latter somehow manages to escape with Kapalkundala, marries her with the help of a priest living nearby and returns to his village home. Thus placed in the social background and within the framework of normal human relationship, the lonely girl, brought up by an awful Tantrik in an atmosphere of natural freedom and social irresponsibility, starts feeling ill at ease. Not that she is enamoured of the *Kapalik*. She has not the slightest attraction towards him. But it is the background of freedom and open nature which has had a firm hold on her delicate sensibility.

For a time all goes well. Meanwhile Lutf Unnisa, who is Nobokumar's former wife but deserted on account of her parents' conversion to Islam, appears on the scene determined to displace Kapalkundala from her husband's love and to win it back for herself. By that time the

*Kapalk* too has reached that village with the avowed intention of sacrificing Kapalkundala in order to win the grace of Goddess Kali. In her anxiety to send Kapalkundala away from the scene, so that she might herself come back to her husband's favour, Lutf Unnisa helps generate in the mind of Nobokumar a sense of distrust about Kapalkundala's chastity. Already unhappy at the "slavery" of married life and pining for the freedom of the sea-side forest, Kapalkundala is bitterly mortified at Nobokumar's distrust. She is led to the Ganga bank by Nobokumar for a pre-sacrificial bath at the bidding of the *Kapalk* and under the influence of strong liquor given by the Tantrik. But at the same time Nobokumar's genuinely loving heart pines for the beautiful Kapalkundala about whose chastity he yearns to be assured. At his earnest entreaty Kapalkundala solemnly avers that she is absolutely chaste and pure but turns down firmly his request for going back home. Just at that moment a terrific tide of the river erodes the bank and carries away Kapalkundala from the eager, outstretched arms of the repentant Nobokumar. Then he too jumps into the swirling waters never to come back again. Thus he pays for his facile distrust with his own life which he would possibly not find worth living without his beloved Kapalkundala.

Here is the description of the first meeting between Nobokumar and Kapalkundala

"As long as Nobokumar was seated on the stone, gazing intently at the beauty of the ocean, he was deprived of the sense of space. Then, all at once, twilight descended and sat on the black waters. He got up and returned towards the sea, and as he turned, ..

in dim twilight, stood a wondrous female form! Masses of hair, unconfined, curling like snakes, falling in a heap to the ankles! Against her hair stood out a jewel form like a painter's canvas. The abundance of her curly tresses prevented the whole of her face from being seen, nevertheless, it could be seen like the moon's rays bursting forth from a cleft in the clouds. The glance from her large eyes was very steady, very intensely deep and full of light. The girl's body was entirely devoid of ornaments. There was a certain charm in her form that it is impossible to describe. Her colour was like the lustre of the half-moon, her hair jet black. The beauty of the skin and hair was enhanced by their close contiguity. One could only feel its wondrous power of

fascination by seeing it in the evening light on the shore of that deep resounding ocean. Then on the lonely shore of the ocean they gazed at each other for a time. After a long interval the woman's voice was heard, she said very softly—'Traveller, have you lost your way?' '\*

Many have compared *Kapalkundala* with *Miranda*, *Shakuntala* and *Lucy Gray*. Parallels can certainly be drawn with these children of sweet seclusion. But *Kapalkundala* has not only different circumstances but also different motivation. The effect of the social milieu upon an innocent mind reared up outside the pale of society has been nicely drawn. Characterization is very impressive, specially that of the hero and the heroine. Nobokumar's heart torn between love and distrust has been finely portrayed. The story and plot-construction are gripping. Above all *Kapalkundala* is a poem in prose. It is a fine response of a highly poetic sensibility to the demands of fiction. It is refreshing to turn back to it these days when poetry has gone completely out of fiction which has become more dreary than life itself.

Bankim's third novel, *Mrinalini* (1869), is not artistically so important as the first two. But it is important from other points of view. He was about 30 while writing it and quite young in the novelist's job. But a sense of mission which dominates many of his later works, fiction and non-fiction, and entitled him to be regarded as one of the builders of the country, seems to have dawned upon him even at that early stage of his life. *Mrinalini* is the first conscious expression of Bankim's patriotic urge.

Like *Durgeshnandini*, *Mrinalini* is once again written within a historical framework. It centres round the story of the alleged conquest of Bengal by Bukhtiyar Khilji with only 17 horsemen. Hem Chandra, the dispossessed prince of Magadh, is charged by Madhavacharya, his preceptor, not only with the task of recovering his lost kingdom from the Pathans but also that of resisting their projected invasion of Bengal, in effect, of freeing the country from foreign conquest and foreign rule. This is the mission of Madhavacharya's life and in it he is indefatigable and unrelenting. The Magadh prince is a fitting instrument in his hands for accomplishing this great task of delivering the motherland from the Pathan intruders. Hem Chandra too is deeply devoted to the task, but his

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\* Translation by H. A. D. Phillips

passionate love for Mrinalini at times weakens his determination and diverts his attention from the great cause—a tendency Madhavacharya does all he can to counteract. But ultimately the mission fails. Through the treachery of the Gaur (Bengal) king's principal minister, Pashupati, Bukhtiyar Khilji does conquer the kingdom with only 17 horsemen, backed, of course, by an army of 25,000 lying hidden in a dense forest nearby.

Madhavacharya is an early anticipation of the militant missionaries of *Anandamath* (Chapter IX) solely dedicated to the country's deliverance from foreign or despotic rule. Bankim's patriotic inspiration has assumed in this novel a fairly clear dimension. Though the mission fails for the time being, it is not abandoned. On the contrary Madhavacharya points to the future with optimistic assurance. One point worthy of notice is this. Bankim never believed that Khilji really conquered Bengal so cheaply with the help of 17 horsemen only. Several years after, he wrote a number of articles (*Vividha Prabandh, Part II*) wherein, with his characteristic zeal for historical reconstruction, he tried to prove that the astounding story of that unbelievably cheap conquest was a canard and a myth. He strongly held the theory that, what to speak of 17 horsemen, Bukhtiyar could not, even with a far larger army, conquer the whole of Bengal. All that the Pathans could do, he held, was to establish military colonies here and there but could not bring the whole of Bengal under their sway.

Why then did Bankim base his *Mrinalini* on a story which he himself did not believe in and which many later historians have sought to repudiate? May be he wanted to show that the Pathan penetration of Bengal could be possible not because of lack of virility or bravery on the part of the people but because of treachery of misguided individuals like Pashupati who did not hesitate to barter away their country's freedom for the sake of their personal gain. Also in the book there is an indication that a 25,000-strong Pathan army was hiding in a nearby forest. When 17 horsemen entered the royal palace through the path opened by treachery, the 25,000-strong army followed, looting, destroying and conquering. In any case the main purpose of writing *Mrinalini*, namely, to create patriotic feelings, was amply fulfilled.



## A Constructive Thinker

**BEHRAMPUR** IS a memorable name in Bankim's career. With his posting there in December 1869 he entered one of the most creative phases of his life. Behrampur, a district town, was then an elite centre, so to say, with a galaxy of writers and intellectuals, each distinguished in his own sphere, living there. Bankim was normally not a clubbable type of a man—he was self-conscious, had even a streak of justifiable pride in him. But at Behrampur he found a like-minded company to associate himself with and soon became its central figure. Prominent among those present at Behrampur at that time were Gurudas Banerjee (later a Judge of the Calcutta High Court), Bhudev Mukherjee, Dinabandhu Mitra, Ramgati Nayaratna, Rajkrishna Mukherjee and a few others—all front-rank intellectuals of those days. They used to meet together and discuss things. In that conclave of kindred spirits did Bankim conceive the idea of bringing out a first-rate Bengali journal approximating to Western standards of excellence. Moni Bagchi tells us that Rajublochan Roy, the Dewan of Maharani Swaranamoyee Devi, offered Bankim a sum of Rs 1,000 for the purpose\*. Thus was brought out the *Bangadarshan* in 1872 under Bankim's inspiring editorship. It was a phenomenal success and became indeed the rallying point of a remarkable literary revival.

Bengal had known a number of journals since the beginning of the 19th century. Gangadhar Bhattacharya's *Bengal Gazette* (1816) is rather an obscure name in the annals of Bengali periodical journalism. But with the publication of the *Digdarshan* monthly and the *Samachar Darpan* weekly, both in 1818, by the Serampore missionaries, Bengali journalism began to make rapid strides. These were followed by Ram Mohan Roy's progressive weekly *Sambad Kaumudi* (1821) counterbalanced by Bhabani Charan Bandyopadhyaya's conservative *Samachar Chandrika* (1822). Then

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\*Bankim Chandra

came a series of journals, namely, the *Sambad Prabhakar* (1831) on the pages of which Bankim himself served a period of useful apprenticeship, the *Tattwabodhini Patrika* (1843) published under the auspices of the Tattwabodhini Sabha of which Devendra Nath Tagore was the leading light, the *Sarvashubhakar Patrika* (1850) sponsored by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, the *Vividharthasangraha* (1867) edited by Rajendralal Mitra dealing with history, art, archaeology, and so on. There were others too in the field but they need not be recounted here. Among these the *Tattwabodhini Patrika* stood out as a remarkable journal, although it was perhaps too high for the people in general.

With their individual good points, none of these journals could however match the *Bangadarshan* in the universality of its appeal, in its emotional warmth combined with intellectual vigour. Through the *Bangadarshan* Bankim freed knowledge from the prison-house of pedantry and brought it down to the level of the people. Into it Bankim breathed his finest creative spirit. He himself enriched its pages with novels, essays, satires, humorous sketches and illuminating book reviews to suit the varying tastes of the different classes of readers. It is indeed surprising to think how amazingly versatile he was—how he was writing simultaneously both serious and light stuff, producing both literature of emotion and literature of intellection handling with equal ease the different genres of literary production. His friends and fellow-writers, of course, contributed richly to the journal's pages under his dynamic editorship. But he himself produced a considerable part of the material published in the magazine. And besides he was a very scrupulous and exacting editor and thoroughly revised, and even re-wrote, others' copies. Everything that appeared in the journal thus bore the unmistakable stamp of Bankim's personality. The *Bangadarshan* set up a milestone in Bengali periodical journalism. It did what its predecessors failed to do—it demonstrated the immense potentiality of the Bengali language as a vehicle for emotional as well as intellectual communication. Without ceasing to be elegant, it helped develop a style of writing that the people could understand and had an immediate appeal to their heart. Its monthly issues carried, apart from novels and satires, serious articles on history, science, literature, antiquities and so on. It opened up a new horizon before the reading public. B C Pal says "*Bangadarshan* did for the contemporary Bengali thought what the French Encyclopaedists did

for the 18th century European thought and the French literature" \* The high standard of journalism set up by the *Bangadarshan* was emulated by several other journals which followed it

Book reviews constituted one of the distinctive features of the journal Bankim did most of the reviews himself, and it was perhaps he who introduced book reviews on modern lines As a reviewer Bankim was generously appreciative of really good books but highly critical of the poor or indifferent performances It has been said that he reviewed books with a bouquet in one hand and broomstick in the other \*\* Above all he was very harsh on all kinds of cant and dilettantism and propagated a seriousness of purpose which he felt, should underlie all literary productions This scrupulous impartiality and high idealism enhanced the prestige of the book reviews and of the journal itself which became an arbiter of letters Thus, the *Bangadarshan* continued for four years exercising an undisputed sway over the contemporary mind and thought Through it Bankim began to emerge before the reading public as a constructive thinker of a high order. The journal was first published from Calcutta and then from Kanthalpara While Bankim used to edit it, Sanjib looked after its printing and production

What indeed was his purpose in bringing out the journal? In his introductory note to its first issue, he regrets the educated Bengalis' neglect of their mother tongue He, therefore, says that the purpose of the journal is to make it at once a mouthpiece of the intelligentsia and a carrier of knowledge to the people in general through their mother tongue Not that he had ceased to be an admirer of English Indeed, during the period he was transferred to Behrampur, he wrote several articles in English including *A Popular Literature for Bengal* and *On the Origin of Hindu Festivals* But he was strongly of the view that knowledge must be disseminated among the people through the language they understood, so that a definite improvement could be made in their outlook and in their life Shortly before the publication of the *Bangadarshan*, he wrote to Shambhu Chandra Mukherjee, editor of *Mukherjee's Magazine*: "I have myself projected a Bengali magazine with the object of making it the medium of communication and sympathy between the educated and the uneducated

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\**My Life and Times*

\*\**Bankim Chandra*, Akshay Dutta Gupta

classes I think that we ought to disanglicise ourselves, so to say, to a certain extent, and speak to the masses in the language they understand ”\*

Rabindranath Tagore pays a glowing tribute to Bankim thus . “The great task Bankim had taken upon himself would have been difficult of achievement by anybody else . . . Because Bankim single-handedly undertook the twin task of creation and criticism did the Bengali literature progress so fast

I remember when Bankim assumed the role of a critic on the pages of the *Bangadarshan*, there was no end of his minor enemies . Hundreds of unworthy people felt jealous of him and would not let go an opportunity to bring down his worth . But Bankim never shrank from duty . Bankim was a *karmayogi* in literature ”\*\*

On the pages of the *Bangadarshan* were serialised many of his important works, namely, *Bishabriksha* ( *The Poison Tree* ), *Indira* ( later enlarged ), *Yugalanguriya* ( *The Two Rings* ), *Chandrashekhar*, *Kamalakanter Daptar* ( later enlarged as *Kamalakanta* ) and so on . But the essays he contributed to the journal were remarkable creations, essays which covered various kinds of topics, historical, critical, sociological, scientific and others . They were his intellectual contribution to the solution of the various problems of the day and bring him out as a thinker of a remarkable quality

Mention must be made of *Bishabriksha*, his most important novel of that period which was published in book form in 1873 . Its importance lay in its being a purely social novel in which he came down from the high romantic plane to the plane of the day to day reality . The social milieu was gripping him

The story is this . While on a boat trip, Nagendra Datta, a well-to-do zamindar, falls into such accidental circumstances that he has to take the responsibility of a young, orphaned girl, Kundanandini, and bring her home to be put in the care of his beautiful and highly loving wife, Surjamukhi . They marry her to Tarachand who is like a brother to Surjamukhi . But after some time Tarachand dies leaving Kunda a tender widow . On the other hand Nagendra, who is otherwise happy with the overwhelming adoration of Surjamukhi, falls in love with Kunda and marries her, despite her being a widow . The shock is too great for Surjamukhi who leaves home in sheer frustration . Nagendra now

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\**Bankim's Works*, Centenary Edition, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad

\*\**Adhunik Sahitya*

realises the folly of his marrying for the second time ignoring Surjamukhi's soulful devotion. The repentent Nagendra goes out in search of Surjamukhi but comes back to his home without being able to find her out. Meanwhile, Surjamukhi herself returns home impelled by her intense love for Nagendra. They are thus happily united. Just at that moment a tragedy, almost an inevitable one under the circumstances, occurs. Faced with a terrible dilemma, Kunda commits suicide, and thus ends the unhappy love tangle. The novel deals with one of the most burning social problems of the day, namely, widow remarriage, which had been legalised after much controversy and mainly through the efforts of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. A definite change in Bankim's outlook as a novelist was evident. His next novel, *Indira* (1873), was also based on a social theme. *Kamalakanter Daptar*, later enlarged as *Kamalakanta*, was a remarkable creation of the period. Through the rhapsodical writings of *Kamalakanta*, an opium-eating idler, Bankim shows his keen social consciousness.

At about this time Bankim persuaded Romesh Chandra Dutt, one of the earliest Indian Civilians and Bankim's junior by ten years, to write in Bengali, even as Drinkwater Bethune had induced Michael Madhusudan Dutt to do so. The junior Civilian having expressed appreciation of some of the characters of Bankim's novels, the veteran novelist said, "If you appreciate Bengali literature why do you not work for it?" On another occasion Bankim told Romesh Chandra, "You will never live by your writings in English." Within two years Dutt's first Bengali work, a historical novel, appeared, and the anglicised Civilian soon became a very important novelist of the Bankim school.\*

Here is an interesting anecdote about Bankim while he was in Behram-pur. One day he was returning from office in a palanquin with one of its doors shut. As he came near a military barrack, where several European soldiers were playing cricket, he heard a rude knock at the closed door of the palanquin. Bankim jumped down and challenged the man who was none else but Col Duffin, the European commanding officer of the cantonment who had possibly taken umbrage at the "native" passing through a European barrack area. But being thus challenged and that

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\**Cultural Heritage of Bengal* & R. C. Dutt's article on Bankim,  
*Navya Bharat Journal*, Baisakh, 1301 (B.S.)

too by a "native", Duffin caught hold of one of Bankim's hands and turned him back. This was a great insult for Bankim. Regardless of the fact that Duffin belonged to the ruling class and was an army officer whom Indians looked upon with much fear those days, Bankim sued him in a court of law. An Indian Deputy Collector suing a European army officer—this was something unprecedented. Behrampur was agog with sensation. Indeed, public opinion was so infuriated against Duffin that no lawyer agreed to defend the European colonel who was really in a tight corner. Finally Duffin had to apologise to Bankim in an open court and in the presence of many spectators, both Indian and European. Here was another eloquent instance of Bankim's strength of character, his independence and fearlessness.

At Behrampur Bankim was extremely popular and happy. Even officially he was considered too useful to be spared for the authorities were most reluctant to let him go from there. But ultimately he left Behrampur on leave in February 1874 and came back to Kanthalpara. His four years in Behrampur were a golden period in his life from the point of view of achievement as well as popularity. But he had one cause of unhappiness—his mother's death. This apart, the family dissension already referred to continued to simmer.

Thereafter he had a few quick transfers and postings. He was in Barasat in May 1874 and then in Maldah in October that year. His health having gone down, he came back home on nine months' leave. Next we find him posted in Hooghly (March 1876) where he had an unbroken stay till about the beginning of 1881 and a prosperous literary career too. Officially he rose to be the Personal Assistant to the Divisional Commissioner of Burdwan, in those days, a position of no mean distinction.

At this time a shocking event, almost a tragedy for the Bengali world of letters, happened when Bankim suddenly stopped the publication of the *Bangadarshan* in March 1876. This came as a great disappointment to its hundreds of admiring readers and created a climate of gloom among them. Bankim did one more thing. Instead of attending office at Hooghly, just across the river, from his village home, he transferred his household to the place of his posting. This was attributed to domestic differences. But why did he put a premature end to his progressive journal? His own explanation given in his farewell message in the

*Bangadarshan* was that, since the purpose of the *Bangadarshan* was to promote high class periodical journalism and since several good journals had by that time appeared in the field, there was no specific need for the *Bangadarshan* to continue. This explanation is hardly convincing. One view of the matter is that Bankim's fearless literary criticisms were creating too many enemies for him and that even a conspiracy was hatched to kill him. This view too is untenable, seeing that Bankim was made of very strong stuff and was not easily to be cowed down in the discharge of what he considered his duty, administrative or literary. It is possible that the official duties were weighing too heavily on him to allow him sufficient leisure for editing such a weighty journal. But family differences might have played a more relevant role in the matter. This supposition is strengthened by two facts. Soon after the *Bangadarshan* ceased publication, Bankim left his village home and set up his household in Hooghly, evidently owing to family differences. Again as has been already mentioned it was Sanjib who used to look after the printing and production of the journal from the beginning. So when the question of reviving the *Bangadarshan* came up, Bankim made over its right to Sanjib who brought it out under his own editorship with, of course, Bankim's full cooperation. Some of Bankim's later works like *Anandamath* appeared on the pages of the revived *Bangadarshan*.

That the glowing vision of history had not left him was evident from his writing *Rajsinha*, the nucleus of his later enlarged novel of the same name and one of his most warmly appreciated fictions (this book was published in book form in 1882). But social consciousness was more pronounced. During this period he wrote several novels, big and small, with social background, including *Rajani*, the remarkable story of a blind flower girl. It is a tender story of love, frustration and final fulfilment. *Rajani*, the blind flower girl, supplies flowers to a rich man's house. The sympathetic touch and tone of the youngest son of that family evokes in her sightless love which finds fulfilment in her marriage with him but not before she has passed through a set of baffling circumstances. Finally she gets back her eyesight through the miraculous powers of a *Sannyasi*. The obvious parallelism between the characters of *Rajani* and *Nydia* in Lord Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834) cannot be missed. Nor was Bankim himself unaware of that. But here again the parallelism is superficial. The barest fact of both *Rajani* and *Nydia* being blind and

flower girls does not make them same or similar. With her strong natural instincts of love and jealousy, Nydia has an inherent dynamism which makes her entirely different from the docile Rajani. In fact Bankim has attempted in this novel something entirely different from Lytton's event-packed classic. *Rajani* is Bankim's experiment with what came to be known later as the psychological type of fiction.

*Krishnakanter Will*, according to many his masterpiece, was written during the nine-month respite from burdensome official duties already referred to. It was serialised in the *Bangadarshan* except for the period the journal ceased to exist and is a far more sophisticated novel than *Bishabriksha*, its nearest parallel. Once again it is the widow theme which cast its shadow on Bankim's mind, as in *Bishabriksha*. Govindalal is the nephew of a rich zamindar, Krishnakanta of Haridragram, while Rohini is a young widow living in the same village. Govindalal has his young and loving wife, Bhramar, and is dutiful towards his uncle who is like a guardian to him. But Govindalal happens to succumb to the wily charms of Rohini and starts doting on her. Being disgusted, Krishnakanta, who has already willed half the share of his property to Govindalal disinherits him making over his entire share to Bhramar. This alienates Govindalal all the more from his wife. Being disinherited and with his mind fixed on Rohini, Govindalal leaves Bhramar alone in Haridragram, Krishnakanta having died by that time, and goes out on undisclosed wanderings. Meanwhile, Rohini too disappears from the village. The two then start living together at a place called Prasadpur, while Bhramar, alone and left behind, pines for the return of her husband. Bhramar's father deposes Nishakar, a friend of his, cleverly to wean Govindalal away from Rohini. At Prasadpur Nishakar manages things in such a way as to have Rohini alone with himself at night near a tank. This rouses Govindalal's jealousy and in a fit of anger he shoots Rohini dead. He, however, escapes conviction in court owing to a clever handling of the witnesses by his father-in-law but becomes a fugitive coming back home after a long interval only to have the last meeting with his wife pining away on her death-bed.

At Chinsurah (Hooghly) Bankim had his residence just on the bank of the Ganga from where he used to enjoy the wonderful nightly beauty of the river. He had very congenial companions in Hooghly too, as he had in Behrampur, notable among them being Bhudev Mukhopadhyaya, an



eminent writer and thinker of those days

During his nine-month leave period Bankim used to visit Calcutta from time to time, when a great meeting took place. At a college reunion function at the Emerald Bower residence of Raja Shaurendra Mohan Tagore, Rabindranath Tagore, then a young literary aspirant, met Bankim, then at the peak of his career, for the first time \*. Although at a later stage Bankim and Tagore were locked in a public controversy over some socio-religious issues, their mutual admiration never waned. In fact, Rabindranath was one of Bankim's most admiring critics and interpreters. On one occasion, Bankim came to attend a marriage function at the residence of Romesh Chandra Dutt where Rabindranath, whose first important book of verse, *Sandhya Sangeet*, had just been published, was also present. When Dutt garlanded Bankim, the latter at once took away the garland and put it on young Rabindranath's neck saying: "Romesh, have you read his (Rabindranath's) *Sandhya Sangeet*?" It was the discovery of one genius by another.

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\**Rabindra Jivani* Vol I, P. K. Mukherji

## Voyage of Discovery

**F**ROM HOOGHLY Bankim was transferred to Howrah in February 1881, while he was still working as Personal Assistant to the Divisional Commissioner. Then again ensued a process of quick transfers and postings, often an inevitable ordeal of the service he belonged to. In the same year Bankim had a bereavement—his father died. The story goes that the same *Sannyasi* who had brought Jadav Chandra back to life in his early days visited him again at Kanthalpara shortly before his death, as if to give him a timely warning of the impending end of his life. And the end was not long delayed.

During the short period Bankim was in Howrah, before coming over to Calcutta as temporary Assistant Secretary to the Government of Bengal, he had a confrontation with the then Collector, C. E. Buckland, the writer of the well-known book, *Bengal Under The Lieutenant-Governors*. The incident is interesting in that it shows how a “native” Deputy Magistrate gave a rebuff to a thorough-bred European Civilian thus silencing the voice of bureaucratic arrogance.

Cognisant of the police high-handedness of those days, Bankim did not necessarily place his credence on all police cases, indeed he did not hesitate to dismiss them wherever he found them weak. This was not naturally liked by his immediate superiors.

Once the Howrah Municipality issued a notice purporting to say that the use of combustible material for the purpose of roofing would be punished. Written in English, the notice was translated into Bengali by the Municipality’s European Secretary whose knowledge of the vernacular was not quite above reproach. In translating the word “combustible” he therefore mistakenly used the Bengali word “jaliya” which means “watery” instead of the word “jwaliya” which really means “combustible”.

That notice was served on a poor, eighty-year old, woman whose humble hut had so modest a roofing material as "golpata", a kind of dry leaf used by the poorer classes in Bengal. When the notice was served on her, the old woman felt assured that she had nothing "watery" about the roofing of her humble cottage. When however, the highly combustible covering of her hut was detected, she was taken into custody and sent up for trial, luckily for her, in Bankim's court. The woman was completely flabbergasted to think what could be "watery" about her roofing. Bankim however realised the whole situation and let her off on ground of insufficient notice.

This enraged Collector Buckland who wrote a strong adverse comment on the judgment, criticising Bankim for his supposed vanity about his knowledge of the Bengali language and calling it an "insufferable pedantry". But Bankim was not the man to pocket the insult. He wrote back equally strongly saying that the Collector was not his judicial superior and demanding an apology from him within a month. Buckland was hardly prepared for such a rebuff from one of his own Indian subordinates. He did not apologise but was conscious all the time that he was wrong in having commented on Bankim's judgment. Finally when Bankim reported the matter to the Commissioner, Buckland found the situation uncomfortable for himself and made it up with Bankim by offering an apology. However it must be said in fairness to Buckland that in his well-known book referred to above he had had the courtesy to pay a tribute to Bankim. But it is interesting to notice that the Government itself was not displeased with Bankim and never reprimanded him for his many quarrels with European magistrates. On the contrary he received throughout his career a steady recognition and regular promotions. Even his prayer for voluntary retirement was most reluctantly granted. For his part, Bankim never tolerated bureaucratic haughtiness nor did he care for favours or frowns. At the same time he was scrupulously honest and just, hard-working and dutiful. "Bankim Chandra was always too conscious of his self-respect to compromise it in order to ingratiate himself with his superiors for a consideration. His awareness of the fact that he occupied a respectable position in the service by dint of his own merit fortified his sense of self-respect. His quarrel with Buckland over some judicial decisions in 1881 and his quarrel with the District Magistrate of Howrah in 1883 showed not merely his confidence

in his ability but also his independence of mind which often jibbed at the restraints imposed by the conditions of service”\*

In September 1881, Bankim was brought over to Calcutta as temporary Assistant Secretary to the Government of Bengal. It was a very high position for Indians those days. But Bankim was allowed to hold it only for a short period. This was an unhappy episode in Bankim's career and needs mention not only because it created a baseless misunderstanding about Bankim's efficiency but also because it shows how bureaucratic prejudice was working in the policy-making chambers of the Bengal Secretariat.

Those days there were the posts of Secretary and Under-Secretary in the Government departments, but there was no post of Assistant Secretary. This post was created for the newly set up Financial Department. It was filled up initially by Robert Knight and then by Rajendra Nath Mitra. It was during the latter's absence that Bankim held it temporarily. But when C. P. L. Macaulay became the Secretary, he recommended the abolition of the post of Assistant Secretary and the creation of that of Under Secretary. This recommendation being operative, Bankim had to leave the post in January 1882 to become Deputy Magistrate at Alipore. This unhappy episode led to the impression among some sections of the public that there was a certain charge against Bankim, namely, that during his tenure of office secrets had travelled out. But Robert Knight, then editor of the *Statesman*, wrote in his paper strongly repudiating the erroneous impression and in the process paying a high tribute to Bankim's character and ability. It was quite possible that the European bureaucracy did not relish the presence of another Indian in their *sanctum sanctorum*, and this would be evident from the fact that the man who was selected to succeed Bankim was a European, Mr. Blythe. With Secretary Macaulay himself Bankim had some occasional brushes in which he seemed to enjoy the support of Lieutenant-Governor Eden.

Bankim did not have to wait long at Alipore. A process of quick transfers and postings took him first to Barasat, to Alipore again and finally to Jajpur in Orissa. In 1883, he was moved to Howrah where he did not have very happy relations with Collector Westmacott who too, like Buckland, sought to interfere with his judicial decisions. But it was

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\* *Freedom Movement in Bengal*, compiled and edited by Nirmal Sinha

at Howrah that he was raised to the first class rank—the highest position in the cadre he belonged to. He moved therefrom to Jhenidah, to Bhadrak in Orissa, to Howrah, to Midnapore and finally to Alipore which was the place of his last posting.

This was a period of distinct and decisive change in his life. We have seen that Bankim had emerged as a constructive thinker since the days of the *Bangadarshan*. But roughly from about the age of forty the freethinker began to be interested in religion and philosophy. It appears that as he advanced in age and gained more and more experience, intellectual curiosity matured into a search for the deeper meaning of life, its goal and consummation. He was seeking to build a bridge between things mundane and the sublime planes of a devout existence. He was on a voyage of discovery of the deeper significance of the Hindu religion shorn of popular beliefs and superstitions.

An occasion came which provided him with an excellent opportunity not only to delve deep into the religious scriptures but also to make an impressive exposition of what he considered the essence of the Hindu faith. It was a challenging occasion which drew him out of his official exclusiveness into a public controversy over the subject. Since the days of Ram Mohan Roy, the Hindu religion had been subjected to bitter attacks by the Christian missionaries and publicists. Even some European historians and orientalists had sought to minimise the Indian heritage. Ram Mohan Roy and many other eminent intellectuals of those days had to take up the challenge and give fitting replies to those attacks on their ancient faith and culture. The atmosphere throughout the 19th century remained tense with polemics centering round religion and religious practices. Indeed it was in a large measure the virulent missionary attacks which put the Hindu religion on the defensive and helped its vigorous revival during the last three decades of the century.

In September 1882, at the residence of the Shovabazar zamindar, a *sradh* ceremony was performed in a grand and impressive manner. It was attended by about 4,000 Pundits and the elite of the Calcutta society. Among other things, the zamindar's family idol, Gopinathji, was displayed on a silver throne. An innocent report of the ceremony having appeared in the *Statesman*, a Scottish missionary, Rev. Hastie, of the General Assembly's Institution (now Scottish Church College of Calcutta)

who prided himself on being a friend of India, launched a vitriolic attack on Hinduism, specially on its idolatrous aspect, in a series of letters appearing in the same newspaper. This he did in utter disregard of the fact that it was a solemn occasion and a mourning one at that. Rev Hastie poured out his deepest scorn on idolatry holding up the Hindu gods and goddesses in the most lurid light. In addition to hurling various kinds of abuses at idolatry, clothed in the language of metaphysics, the Scottish missionary wrote "And these learned men (referring to the elite of Calcutta present on the occasion) who stood in apparent reverence before the image of Gopinathji at the great *sradh*, knew it well, and must have felt with inward bitterness, that the faith of their youth had fled and that they were standing there before the last sham of the 19th century in Bengal. Their fate is a hard one and will grow harder henceforth every-day if they do not yet put away their idols and feel after the living God."\* Thus wrote Rev Hastie uttering a sort of a warning of a religio-moral degradation for the educated Indians still steeped in idolatrous practices.

Bankim was then in Jajpur. With his mind already preoccupied with the eternal verities of the Hindu faith, he found in Rev Hastie's letters an affront he felt he could not let go unchallenged. He, therefore, came out in the columns of the same paper under the pseudonym of Ram Chandra replying with all the emphasis and erudition he could command to the missionary's charges. Thus went on a long and keen controversy of absorbing public interest. But, although he wrote under an assumed name, it was known before long that the writer of those remarkable letters was none else but the famous author of *Kapalkundala*.

Meeting ridicule with ridicule Bankim wrote "Will you allow me to suggest to Mr Hastie who is so ambitious of earning a distinction as a sort of an Indian St Paul that it is fit that he should better acquaint himself with the doctrines of Hindu religion before he seeks to demolish them?" Mr Hastie's attempt to storm the inner citadel of Hindu religion forcibly reminds us of another equally heroic achievement—that of the redoubtable knight of La Mancha before the windmill\*\*\*

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\* Centenary Edition of *Bankim's Works*, edited by Brojendra Nath Banerji and Sajan Kanta Das, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad

\*\* *Ibid*

These were hard words but not unprovoked. But ridicule apart, what Bankim really did on the occasion was that in successive rejoinders he brought out the fundamentals of the Hindu religion and placed the same powerfully before the educated public, thereby demonstrating how ill-informed and hence misguided missionary attacks on Hinduism were. He explained the concept of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva as symbolic of Love, Power and Justice. Krishna and Radha, he said, were symbols of Soul and Nature. As regards idolatry he wrote "Mr Hastie will probably be startled to hear that idolatry, though a part of Hinduism, is not an essential part even of the popular worship. Idol worship is permitted, is even belauded, in the Hindu scriptures, but it is not enjoined as compulsory."

The orthodox Brahman is bound to worship Vishnu and Shiva every day but he is not bound to worship their images. "A man may never have entered a temple and yet be an orthodox Hindu"\* And idolatry is not straightway condemnable either, he argued, it is but an externalisation of the ideal of the divine in man. Does not man always seek to find a material form for his mental image? Is not this instinct the root of all art, poetry and drama? Bankim wrote "The existence of idols is as justifiable as that of the tragedy of Hamlet or the story of Prometheus. The religious worship of idols is as justifiable as the intellectual worship of Hamlet or Prometheus"\*\*\* It was indeed an enlightened explanation of image worship.

That his mind was much occupied with probing the depths of the Hindu religion and philosophy was apparent also from an incomplete series of letters he wrote supposedly to his friend, Jogendra Chandra Ghosh, who was an eminent positivist of those days. These writings known as *Letters on Hinduism* bear an unmistakable testimony to his great erudition and powerful analytical acumen. In his effort to get at the essence of Hindu religion, he discusses its origin and history, its legends and myths, the polytheism inherent in it, its various adjuncts and accretions of centuries. One important aim of Bankim in writing these letters was to clear Hinduism of "the popular delusions" which have "encrusted Hinduism with the rubbish of ages—with superstitions and absurdities which subvert its higher purposes and which it is the duty of every Hindu

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\* *Ibid*

\*\* *Ibid*

actively to assail and destroy.”\* He was out on a discovery of the eternal truths underlying the Hindu religion which were good for all ages and all mankind. In other words his effort was to rediscover the essence of Hinduism in the light of reason, though not divorced from faith.

The trend of Bankim's thought from this time onwards provides an interesting study. It must have been a very crucial period of his mental development when he was no longer being detained by the frills and fancies of romantic fiction. He had ceased to be a mere artist, he was emerging as a man with a message.

It is also interesting to notice that even before Bankim had engaged himself in the memorable Hastie controversy, he had started writing his patriotic fiction *Anandamath* which contains his famous *Vande Mataram* song. It came out in book form shortly after the Hastie controversy in 1882. It is possible to surmise that at that time his mind was full of a patriotic fervour which he wanted to communicate to his countrymen. Here an important question comes up. What exactly was Bankim's mental image at that time? While the Hastie controversy showed his deep religious affiliation, *Anandamath* brought out his pure patriotism. How could he reconcile these two different trends, one religious and the other mundane, in his own mental make-up? The possible explanation is this. Patriotic fervour had already been roused in him partly by his close acquaintance with the miserable condition of his countrymen and partly by his preoccupation with the European philosophies concerned with human welfare. At the same time deeper religious instincts were also stirring in his heart, setting him out on a search for higher values in life. The two trends, apparently contrary, were co-existing in his mind at that particular moment only to be merged together subsequently in his overall philosophy of life. And, as we shall see later, *Anandamath* raises patriotism to a religious pitch, his system of philosophy being incomplete without patriotism. Here was the beginning of his socio-religious message whose culmination is found in his *Krishnacharitra* and *Dharmatattwa—Anushilan*.

*Anandamath* was followed by *Devī Chaudhurani* wherein he tried to emphasise in terms of human situations and human characters the value of self-cultivation for attaining higher conditions of life. In the per-

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\* *Ibid*



sonality of Devi, a female character ruling over a gang of dacoits, he tries to embody the ideal of non-attached action as prescribed in the *Gita*. Serialised partly in the revived *Bangadarshan*, *Devi Chaudhurani* came out in book form in 1884. By that time the *Bangadarshan* had gone down very much—it actually stopped publication in March 1883. Efforts for its further revival succeeded only for a short while and then it was finally stopped. Bankim was urgently in need of a journal, through which he could deliver his message. Accordingly he sponsored a small magazine called *Prachar* in July 1884 with his son-in-law, Rakhal Chandra Bandyopadhyaya, in the forefront and himself enriching its pages with his contributions. The name *Prachar* is significant and appears to have been advisedly chosen—in its best sense it means the propagation of a message. And message it was that Bankim wanted to deliver, for, in the columns of the *Prachar* he serialised a remarkable book, *Krishnacharitra*, which is a magnificent exposition of the character and personality of Krishna. *Sitaram*, in a way, his last novel, also appeared on the pages of the *Prachar*. It is an amalgam of patriotism and ethics. Published in book form in 1887, *Sitaram*, like *Anandamath* and *Devi Chaudhurani*, is also a novel with a purpose.

Only a fortnight before *Prachar* came out, Bankim's friend and collaborator, Akshay Chandra Sarkar had started his journal, *Navajwan* (New Life) on whose pages appeared Bankim's religious treatise known as *Dharmatattwa-Anushilan*.

On the pages of the *Prachar* he also wrote an incomplete commentary on the *Gita* (*Srimadbhagavadgita*) and a treatise on the Hindu religion and Hindu gods and goddesses (*Hindu Dharma O Devatattwa*). The *Prachar* itself stopped publication in 1889. Bankim regarded the *Gita* as the holiest book in the world. But in his opinion, the *Gita* should really end with Vishwa-upadarshan. The later chapters, he felt, were interpolations. In the other work he discusses the Vedic gods and goddesses and ultimately comes to the conclusion that Hinduism is basically monotheistic. On the pages of *Prachar* and *Navajwan*, Bankim thus wrote four treatises on the different aspects of the Hindu religion. Along with his Hastie controversy letters and those on Hinduism, they constitute Bankim's major works, and the cream of his thinking, on the Hindu religion in its purest form.

So much about Bankim, the man with a message. But the last great work of Bankim, the artist, was the revision and enlargement of his earlier short story, *Rajsinha*, into a full-fledged historical novel, and this was done in 1893, only a few months before his death. According to many, it is, if not the best novel, at least one of the best novels of Bankim. *Rajsinha* shows that the artist in him could not be crushed under the burden of a great message and even when the end of his life was not too far away .

## Consummation

FROM THE foregoing chapter an idea of the trend of Bankim's mind can be had. He began life as a free thinker, then preoccupied himself with the European philosophies of utilitarianism and more particularly of positivism, but finally turned to what he considered fundamental in the Hindu religion and philosophy. It has already been mentioned that the background of the seventies and the eighties of the last century was one of a great religious reawakening. There was a fervent revival of the Hindu faith, which was a vigorous reaction against its earlier denigration under the first impact of Westernism coupled with missionary attacks and due partly to Brahmo radicalism. A sensitive mind like Bankim's could hardly escape the dominant note of the age. Possibly under his borrowed Westernism there lay dormant an inherent religious instinct which came out spontaneously with the maturer experiences of life and in an atmosphere saturated with a spurt of religious revival.

His *Krishnacharitra* (first published in 1886 and then in a revised and enlarged form in 1892) has been described by Fraser as "the crowning work of all his labours"\*. J. N. Farquhar too pays it a high tribute saying that it was by far the most influential book of the neo-Krishna literature\*\*. But it is not just a philosophical tract or a theological dissertation, it is history, archaeology, philosophy, religion, all combined together and also a magnificent synthesis of Eastern erudition and Western scholarship. It is a monument to his profound learning as well as religious perception.

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\* *Literary History of India*

\*\* *Modern Religious Movements in India*

In reinterpreting the character and personality of Krishna, Bankim lays down some tests. If the old heritage is to be retained, he says, one must examine if there is anything worth retaining in it. If however the past legacy is to be eliminated, one must examine the Krishna legend and cult since Krishna is an inseparable part of India's hoary heritage. With this approach in mind he delves deep into India's ancient history, scriptures and Puranas and seeks to establish Krishna as the most perfect character. But this he does, not through an easy appeal to faith, but through a strictly rational approach. What appears to be interpolation in the sacred texts is rejected, and what smacks of being otherwise imaginary is not given any credit at all. Thus he adopts a rational-scientific method in his approach to his subject.

Separating the chaff from the grain, he proves the historicity of Krishna and also that a large part of the *Mahabharat* has historical basis. Regarding Krishna he says "I too firmly believe that Krishna is God incarnate, my Western education has only strengthened this belief." But here in this work he does not allow his firm faith to interfere with his historical judgement, here he is concerned with Krishna as a human character, with historical Krishna. And he is firmly of the opinion that an ideal character like Krishna, with a harmonious blending of the highest qualities and free from blemish of any kind, could not be found in any other country's history or literature.

But in seeking to establish Krishna as an ideal character, he has first to clear him of the large accretion of myths and legends round his personality. By applying his powerful analytical erudition, he tears asunder all the disagreeable myths and stories which have grown round Krishna through the ages. His aim of establishing Krishna as the human incarnation of the Divine has been well served in this book. With an extra-ordinary courage, Bankim clears the age-long dross that has encrusted the Krishna legends. Not many could claim his courage as well as rationality.

In some quarters Bankim's methodology has been compared to Ernest Renan's. In reconstructing the life of Jesus, the noted French writer has followed what he calls "the principle of historical criticism", going in depth into the various gospels, bringing out their differences and

contradictions and devaluing miracles and supernaturalism. Finally he has placed Jesus "at the highest summit of human greatness", as Bankim has done in respect of Krishna. In both the cases passion for historical exactitude is not unmixed with faith and devotion. Both apparently felt that the great problem of their own times was to present a truly religious spirit without the deforming touch of superstitions and absurdities so unacceptable to reason and common sense.

Bankim's other work of the period, *Dharmatattwa* (first part)—*Anushulan* (The Philosophy of Religion, its cultural aspect) is a monumental work of erudition and intellection. Perhaps Bankim had a plan to add another part to the book which however he could not do. Substantially serialised in *Navajwan*, it came out in book form in 1888 and contains the cream of Bankim's thinking on religion and philosophy. In the form of a catechism between a preceptor and his disciple, Bankim discusses in his book philosophical questions like the aim and purpose of human life and its more fundamental problems of happiness and perfection. *Dharmatattwa* is religion and ethics combined, more ethics than religion as it is commonly understood. It builds up an elaborate code of conduct to guide human life along the correct path of happiness and welfare, while linking it up with God through devotion. The teachings of the book are briefly as follows. True happiness or rather the consummation of human life lies in the harmonious cultivation of all faculties, physical and mental. Analysing the nature of man's intellectual, physical and emotional faculties and such qualities as love, devotion and kindness in their different forms, Bankim emphasises that in attaining a balance of them all lies true humanity. Such a self-cultivation finds its highest fulfilment when it converges in God through a state of mind called devotion. To attain this condition is his religion. Once this state of mind is reached, there is no difficulty for man to love not only his own society or country but all mankind. Is not God manifest in all the created beings? Love in its different manifestations—love of oneself, of one's family or society or country—flows ultimately from the love of God. And circumstanced as man is, love for the country is for him the highest virtue, next only to the love of God. This apotheosis of patriotism is a unique feature of Bankim's philosophy. There are not many writers who have made love of the

country so much of an integral part of their religious philosophy or given it so high a place in their ethical system. In propounding his philosophical doctrines, Bankim uses no metaphysical jargon but prescribes a practical religion of man as a part of devotion to God. His main concern is not to escape into an ivory tower of philosophical bliss but to be truly human in the world of man.

The preaching of neo-Hinduism on the pages of the *Prachar* and the *Navajwan* made Bankim a target of attack from several quarters and even dragged him into open polemics. Some people thought that he was distorting Hinduism by adulterating it with European hedonism. Some again blamed him for being otherwise wrong in his interpretation of Hindu religion. But most memorable was Bankim's controversy with the Adi Brahmo Samaj. The history of this controversy lies scattered on the pages of the contemporary journals like the *Tattwabodhini Patrika* and the *Bharati* of the Tagore school, the *Prachar* and the *Navajwan*, Bankim's own vehicles of expression, the radical Brahmo organ *Sanjvani*, and the conservative Hindu mouthpiece *Bangabasi*.

The Brahmo Samaj itself had, by that time, trifurcated into Adi Brahmo Samaj, Sadharan Brahmo Samaj and Nabavidhan Samaj. The Adi Brahmo Samaj associated with the powerful personality of Devendra Nath Tagore, was conservative compared to the radical Brahmos and considered itself the most authentic interpreter of Hinduism in its refined form. When, however, a neo-Hindu revival started, specially under the personal inspiration of Bankim, it must have felt somewhat ill at ease.

It appears that Bankim's interpretation of Hinduism in the *Prachar* and the *Navajwan* was first called in question by Dwijendra Nath Tagore, Rabindranath Tagore's elder brother, on the ground that the former was preaching European hedonism in the garb of Hinduism, a philosophy that recognises happiness alone, born of a harmonious functioning of all human faculties, as the true religion, Hinduism, it was contended, never aimed at such a happiness.

But more memorable was the war of words between Bankim and Rabindranath Tagore, then the youthful Secretary of the Adi Brahmo Samaj. In one of his essays Bankim visualised two characters, one devoted to the outward formalities of religion but basically dishonest and inhuman, and the other, completely contemptuous of rites and formalities but basically honest and God-fearing and scrupulously free from falsehood.

or pretence, except for the sake of human good. In conformity with a famous dictum of Krishna, Bankim was thus trying to bring out that religion did not mean formal adherence to outward show and ritualism, but basic purity of character. This new angle given to religion touched the fine Brahmo sensibility of Rabindranath Tagore who gave a powerful reply stating that untruth is untruth under any circumstances, even if Krishna ordained it otherwise. The controversy between the two great geniuses, one at his maturest and the other at his youthful best, continued for some time but not long or bitterly enough to impair their basic mutual understanding and regard. Essentially they were friends and admirers of each other, Rabindranath was to Bankim like a younger brother or as a disciple is to his preceptor. Yet they spoke out when occasion demanded, because they were too honest not to have done so.

As already mentioned, Bankim had his posting in Alipore in 1888—his last posting. Earlier he had purchased a house at Calcutta and was living there. He had also undertaken a tour of Upper India. Bankim's stay at Alipore was, however, not happy. His characteristic independence brought him into a clash with Collector Baker, and this appears to have made him feel disgusted with his service of which he was not even normally enamoured. He, therefore, sought early retirement in 1890, but his petition was not granted. He was then only 52 years of age and not due for retirement. Nor was he physically unfit, he had only one disease, diabetes, which was not a disabling disease. At last the Lieutenant-Governor granted his prayer. Having served the Government for over 33 years, he retired from his strenuous and varied service life in September 1891.

From that time onwards his literary activities were limited mostly to revising and enlarging his earlier books. Among these the revision of *Rajsinha* was most notable for reasons already mentioned. He also edited Sanjib Chandra's works. In 1891, he became associated with the Society for the Higher Training of Youngmen, an institution which was later renamed the University Institute and became a hub of student activity. He delivered a lecture to the Society on Vedic literature. The Government conferred on him the title of Rai Bahadur in January 1892 and C.I.E. in January 1894. As a member of the Calcutta University's Senate, he pleaded, though unsuccessfully, for making Bengali one of the subjects of study at the university level.

Bankim's retired life was happy and peaceful. He was at the peak of glory, loved and admired as a maker of the modern Bengali fiction, venerated as a father-figure who had breathed a new life into literature. His house in Calcutta was a haunt of litterateurs, old and new. Particularly, to the rising generation of writers he acted as a mentor and a source of unfailing inspiration. The high seriousness of purpose with which he looked upon literature was evident from an essay he wrote entitled *Banglar Nabya Lekhakder Prati Nibedan (Vividha Prabandha, II)* (An appeal to new writers of Bengal). In that essay he shows that literary effort is justified only if it aims at the good of the country or mankind or the creation of beauty and that literature is based on Truth and *Dharma*. It is this sense of literary mission that he brought to bear upon his younger contemporaries.

But this even tenor of his peaceful retired life could not go on for long. He had been a diabetes patient for quite some time, suddenly the disease took a serious turn early in 1894. From the middle of March onwards his suffering was acute. All kinds of treatments by doctors, Indian and European, proved unavailing. His condition began to deteriorate from April 5 onwards. The end of his life came on April 8, 1894 in the afternoon.

The shining star on the horizon of Bengali literature set at last. The work of his life was yet incomplete. Several of his works were unfinished. His projected history of India was yet unwritten. His express desire to base one of his fictions on the life of the Rani of Jhansi for whom he had a high admiration was still unfulfilled. He was only 56 and still had plenty of creative spirit in him. Had he been spared for a few years more, he could possibly have made richer contributions to thought and culture. But fate ordained otherwise.

As the shocking news of his death spread, people flocked from all quarters in large numbers to pay their sorrowful tribute to one who had kept them spell-bound for about 30 years with the magic of his pen. The body was taken in a procession to the burning ghat where the last remains were consigned to the flames in the midst of touching scenes. A huge public meeting was held at the Calcutta Town Hall which witnessed a massive expression of grief. Bankim's death called forth an upsurge of sorrow not easily to be matched.

Death snatched Bankim away when he was at the height of popularity.



His books were very much in demand, they had gone through several editions each even during his life-time. He also lived to see some of his novels translated into European and Indian languages. Some of them had been dramatised and put very successfully on the stage. If literary recognition is the consummation of a writer's life, Bankim had received plenty of it.

Yet it must be said that a deeper and fuller appreciation of Bankim as a nation-builder, or of his impact upon society, culture and politics, did not come until after his death. As days went by people began to realise the value of his constructive thought, his fervent patriotism, his passion for building the nation, his reinterpretation of the country's ancient heritage in the modern light. It was exactly eleven years after his death that the mighty movement against the partition of Bengal rocked the whole of India giving currency to the *Vande Mataram* hymn. The novelist Bankim gradually came to occupy in the heart of the people the position of the prophet of India's nationalism, one who had taught them to regard their country in terms of motherhood and also to value their national heritage.

Thus ended a life not spectacularly eventful, as a politician's life may be and often is. It was rather the routine life of a government servant in a colonial administration. The life of a man of action can be measured in terms of physical achievements. But that of a thinker is different. His achievements belong to the realm of the spirit and are slow to fructify. Like a deep acting agent, they slowly permeate the life of the society to bring about radical changes in its thought or behaviour pattern. That is what happened in the case of Bankim.

## Creative Versatility

**B**ANKIM HAS been described as “the great novelist of India during the 19th century”,\* or more appropriately perhaps as “the first great creative genius of modern India” \*\* He was indeed the maker of a literature. He breathed into his neglected mother tongue the finest spirit of a master mind and put it on a footing of unquestioned elegance and dignity. In a way he resembled the English romantics who broke away from the dry 18th century tradition to create a new world of beauty and romance. Bankim too freed literature from various kinds of shackles and drawbacks to make it instinct with a new creative spirit. In the process he brought language down from the plane of pedantry to the plane of the people, so that it might serve them as a medium of instruction as well as of entertainment, without, however, losing its grace, elegance and dignity.

Bankim's primary claim to recognition rests, of course, on his novels. Indeed it was he who created the Bengali novel in its present form. Before his advent Bengali literature had no novels in the true sense of the term—it had only tales, translations and adaptations. The nearest approximation to novels were the sketches, as already mentioned. *Alaler Gharer Dulal* had most of the characteristics of a full-fledged novel, but it lacked the depth, dimension and discernment which ordinarily characterise a novel. It was left to Bankim to create novel as a literary form in Bengali. His maiden offering, *Durgeshnandini*, itself became a landmark in the development of Bengali novel, even though it was not artistically a very mature work. But it held out definite promise which found full flowering in his very next fiction, *Kapalkundala*.

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\* *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th edition

\*\* *Literary History of India*, Fraser

What indeed were the characteristics of Bankim's novels? It is generally admitted that the form of his novel is West-inspired "He created in India a school of fiction on the Western model" \* That he had a deep acquaintance with the Western masters of fiction, like Sir Walter Scott, Lord Lytton and others, is obvious It is also apparent that in his youthful days his inherent urge for artistic self-expression derived strength and support from his study of the Western literature This is one point on which some of his Indian critics are sore with him They think that Bankim has dished up Western stuff in an Indian garb

But a deeper analysis will show that the content of his novels is very much Eastern Even in his early fictions like *Durgeshnandini* and *Kapalkundala*, where he is a pure artist unburdened with a message, he paints characters like Tilottama having all the qualities of an Indian virgin girl, loving but bashful, sweet and selfless in love and devotion Similarly *Kapalkundala* is covered with the weird aura typical of the mysterious East The values he upholds through his characters and situations in respect of human relations generally and in domestic matters particularly are Eastern values At places he introduces poetic justice only to bring out the triumph of the good and the suffering of the sinful Many of his critics regretfully feel that he brought Rohini's life to an inglorious end only to punish the sinning woman Shaibalini too has to atone painfully for her love out of wedlock for Pratap, Bankim's preoccupation with the Indian values of morality and conduct are palpable At the same time modern trends also left a deep impress upon his works For instance, he brought in sentiments which were contrary to the then prevailing social mores, namely, premarital love, which had no social sanction those days Similarly widow remarriage, the most burning question of the day, is the central theme of two of his novels These were the reflections of the tensions and strains consequent upon the passing out of the old order and the advent of the new at the momentous juncture of which stood Bankim and his works He borrowed a Western form no doubt but made it thoroughly instinct with Indian spirit

Any categorisation of Bankim's novels is bound to be overlapping Most of them have some common characteristics which are basic to them Depending on emphasis, however, they can be put into four broad groups—

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\* *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th edition

romantic, historical, social and novels with a purpose. But, once again, the basic traits of these four broad categories of fiction overlap. Essentially he was a romanticist—even his social novels have not escaped the romantic touch. A romance deals with life no doubt but, at the same time, seeks to transfigure it, emphasising its beauty and passion, its heroic and imaginative aspects. In a novel, art tends towards the actual conditions of life, in a romance, it lifts life itself to a higher plane. From this point of view, his *Durgeshnandini*, *Kapalkundala*, *Mrinalini*, *Chandrashekhara*, *Anandamath*, *Devī Chaudhurani*, *Sitaram*—all are romantic. They are no doubt built round real life, mostly against the background of the historical times, but they so transfigure life itself that it becomes a beautiful or a tragic dream, depending on the trend of the story.

Skilful plot construction, mastery of character drawing, sparkling flow of narration, splendour of description—these are some of the characteristics his novels have in abundance. The romantic quality of his novels is enchanting. But some of his fictions, *Chandrashekhara* and *Sitaram*, for instance, suffer from a surfeit of romance. Also in the wide sweep of his imagination, Bankim did not hesitate to take the help of miracle and accident. They sometimes detract from the artistic effect of his works. Even then it must be said that Bankim had a remarkable capacity for plot construction. In most, though not all, cases he fitted accidents and miracles easily and skilfully into the story without jarring upon the readers' artistic sensibility. Above all Bankim's story-telling is spell-binding.

As a novelist, Bankim belonged to the 19th century tradition. Novel as a form of art has travelled long distances from that tradition to the present day. The ideas and techniques of novels have completely changed. The modern fiction is analytical, psychological, it tends to probe deeper and deeper into the human psyche instead of going in for charming tales or entrancing narratives. Naturally the 19th century character of Bankim's fictions may not be set up to the modern liking. Even then Bankim's works continue to be greatly popular, even as classics are popular. They have a basic core of beauty and charm, an elegance and grandeur, which age cannot wither. These qualities are above the changing fashions in literary taste and will continue to claim admiring attention.

It is also interesting to note that Bankim himself turned towards

a type of fiction which might be said to have marked the faint beginnings of the psychological fiction in Bengali literature. His *Rajani*, wherein the *dramatis personae* speak subjectively, and his *Indira*, wherein the heroine speaks in her own person, employ just the methods which turn from events in the physical world towards changes in the psychical.

Bankim's passion for history burns bright throughout his novels, earning him the appellation "the Sir Walter Scott of Bengal". Historical novels must deal with historical personages and situations. But must they conform strictly to the facts and details of history? There is a difference of opinion on this point. Generally it may be said that a historical novel must broadly conform to history, but at the same time the writer's imagination must not be denied a free play. Not that history should be tampered with. But the writer should have sufficient freedom to enliven the dry bones of history.

Generally speaking Bankim did not make a fetish of history. Romesh Chandra Dutt, an eminent historian and Bankim's disciple in fiction-writing, gave historical accuracy the first place in his novels. But not so Bankim, who, in most of his fictions, took the barest cue from history to build his own human story thereon. Sometimes he linked up his story with a larger historical background. In *Kapalkundala*, for instance, the historical episode linking Lutf Unnisa with Nobokumar on the one hand and the Mughal court in Agra on the other might seem irrelevant, but he fitted it in the plot very skilfully to create an additional interest in the story. Many of his novels can thus be called semi-historical. Aware of this self-imposed limitation on borrowing from history, he hesitated to call any of his novels historical except *Rajsinha*—he called it his first and only historical novel. Perhaps he was a little too unkind towards his first child, *Durgeshnandini*, which has all the qualities of an historical novel.

The story of *Rajsinha* is a part of the history of the conflicts Aurangzeb had with the Rajput chiefs. *Rajsinha* broadly conforms to history. Nowhere are the facts of history coloured or discoloured either by imaginative exuberance or by prejudice.

Chanchalkumari, the princess of a small Rajput state called Rupnagar, is drawn towards Maharaja Rajsinha of Udaipur on seeing a picture of his. Contrarily, she kicks at a picture of the dreaded Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, though in a jocular vein. In revenge Aurangzeb sends an army to Rupnagar to capture the princess. Proud of her

Rajput ancestry, Chanchalkumari appeals to Rajsinha for rescuing her from the clutches of the Mughals. Among the Rajput rulers Rajsinha alone is holding his head high against the onslaughts of the Mughals. He determines to save the helpless princess and thus invites a serious clash with Aurangzeb. Originating from a simple incident of feminine freak, the conflict takes the dimension of a large-scale warfare between the Rajputs and the Mughals in which the latter meet with repeated discomfitures. The novel gives a magnificent description of the course of the war and the movement of the entire Mughal army including the Emperor who, owing to Rajsinha's superior war strategy, are locked up in an insurmountable mountain pass. The novel is a succession of dazzling events coming with a thrilling rapidity and keeps the readers spell-bound. Here Bankim's story-telling is at its best, his narrative art at its grandest. The characters are most fascinatingly drawn. Apart from Chanchalkumari and Rajsinha, those of Nirmalkumari and Maniklal and of Mobarak and Zebunnisa are some of the finest on Bankim's portrait gallery. As a work of art, it is one of Bankim's best.

Another important fiction, *Chandrashekhara* (1875) has again got an historical background—the conflict between Nawab Mir Kasim of Bengal and the English. Bankim seems to have been particularly interested in those twilight periods of history which depict the progressive decline of the Muslim rule and the gradual advent of the English in India. Various aspects of the chaos and anarchy coming in the wake of that tremendous power vacuum occur again and again in his fictions. Of this we shall see more later. But in *Chandrashekhara*, as in some of his other fictions, history is less important than the human story. Here Bankim links up the turmoil in the life of three individuals with the bigger turmoil on the political front, that is, the conflict between the Nawab and the English. The story centres round the unmarried attachment between Shaibalini and Pratap which, however, does not find fulfilment in marriage. The main focus is on Shaibalini's continuing passion for Pratap even after her marriage with Chandrashekhara, an elderly man of scholarly indifference, who is too noble to be of human warmth towards his young wife. In Pratap, Bankim paints an ideal character who sacrifices his life only to end Shaibalini's hankering for himself and thus to give peace to her restless mind. For her part Shaibalini is made to go through a rigorous process of self-discipline and self-purification.

We have in Bankim's works some fine male characters. They are however drawn in rather simple outline without much of a variety or complexity in them. From that point of view his male side characters are more interesting, with all their traits, good or bad. Bankim, however, poured out all the warmth and favour of his imagination on his female characters. They are most impressive. The dynamic force that goes into his skilful plot construction flows mostly from his female characters. Among them we have the loving but frustrated housewife, Surjamukhi, the wily widow Rohini, so unlike the mutely suffering Kundanandini, the resourceful Bimala who avenged her husband's murder on Katlu Khan and Shaibalini who is ever restless in her burning passion for Pratap. There are other such characters also.

Bankim's novels are, by and large, fine works of art, and as a novelist he occupies a position of pre-eminence. But apart from these, a large body of non-fiction writing flowed from his pen in profusion which constituted his contribution to thought. It is in itself remarkable enough to earn him an undying place in the literature of intellection. In this group fall the innumerable essays and reviews he contributed to the *Bangadarshan* or wrote otherwise, essays and dissertations on history, sociology, religion, archaeology, literature and even science. These were in addition to his two monumental works, *Krishnacharitra* and *Dharmatattva*, and of course *Kamalakanta* which is a class by itself and stands apart.

It is a tribute to Bankim's intellectual keenness that as early as in the seventies of the last century he had grasped the intricacies of Western science and taken pains to elucidate the same on the pages of the *Bangadarshan* in simple but forceful Bengali so as to make them intelligible to the people at large. These essays compiled under the title *Vijnan Rahasya* deal with various topics like the solar system, the antiquity of man, motion and sound and so on. Bankim deeply deplored the lack of cultivation of science in India. With all his religious inclination, he was an advocate of materialism to the extent that he considered scientific culture essential to the country's rejuvenation. He said "If you serve science, science will serve you, if you are devoted to science, science will be devoted to you. But if you ignore science it will become your mortal."\* He realised that

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\* *Bharatvarsher Vijnan Sabha*, an essay published in the *Bangadarshan* and attributed to Bankim, *Bankim's Works*, Sahitya Sansad.

the power and prosperity of modern Europe was due to science. As regards India, he felt that the British had got hold over it because of their scientific superiority. Indeed with the help of their scientific knowledge the British were only emasculating the Indians. Bankim, therefore, welcomed a spell of British rule, so that some scientific spirit, some Western materialism, might be injected into the Indians who had become too other worldly. In his *Dharmatattwa*, the preceptor recommends a study of the natural and social sciences under the tutelage of the West before one could realise God through religious pursuits. Bankim was attempting something like a bridge-building between science and religion.

In another group of essays he deals with literary subjects like *Uttararamcharit*, *Shakuntala*, *Miranda*, *Desdemona* and so on. His book reviews themselves were excellent pieces of literary criticism which brought out his erudition as well as discernment. Some of these represent an early effort in the study of comparative literature.

The group of essays in which he deals with the social and historical subjects are most important. They are his own solutions to the various contemporary problems including that of national revival. With him the first premise of a nation's progress is its own history. "A nation without history is destined to suffer infinitely," he says. His greatest regret was that India had no tradition of history. If Europeans go on bird shooting, it is recorded in history. But we Indians had no sense of history, he felt. A nation that is ignorant of its past cannot be great. His utmost effort, therefore, was to reconstruct his country's past out of the materials available at that time. Indeed, about the year 1880, he was planning a comprehensive history of India which, however, he had not the time to take up.

In an essay entitled *Bharat Kalanka*, he tried to show that a sense of nationality and craving for independence were lacking among the ancient Indians who had no collective consciousness for political action or political good. Indeed they appear to have been indifferent to the question whether the ruler was a son of the soil or an outsider. In the entire range of ancient Indian literature and holy texts, there are many virtues depicted in glowing terms but not nationalism as we understand it. Independence and nationality are England's two gifts to India for which Bankim is beholden to the British people. This brings us to another essay, *Bharatvarsher Swadhinata Ebang Paradhinata* (India's Independence



and Slavery), wherein he objectively analyses the merits and demerits of the British rule in India compared to the Hindu period of history. With a frankness not ordinarily expected of a government official, he points out the various disabilities India suffered from under a ruler who did not belong to this country and was an absentee king. He refers in particular to the Home Charges which India had to pay for England's benefit and to the system of judicial discrimination under which an Indian was not entitled to trying an Englishman (this injustice was sought to be remedied through the Ilbert Bill). But Bankim does not fail to notice that in ancient India the caste system and Brahminocracy enforced greater discrimination on the people.

Regarding the history of Bengal, Bankim had some favourite theses. He believed that it was the Mughal imperialism, and not the Pathan invasion, which was responsible for Bengal's decline. The Mughals carried away Bengal's wealth to their imperial capital in Delhi. They were the real enemies of Bengal, while the Pathans were friends.

According to Rakhal Das Bandyopadhyaya, who was an eminent historian himself, Bankim scrupulously applied scientific methods to historical study and virtually laid the foundation of historical research in Bengal\*. One of the fruits of his ethnological investigations was the thesis that the Bengalis were a mixed race, with non-Aryan blood preponderating in them.

In another group of writings Bankim emerges as a propounder of socio-economic views which were certainly radical by the contemporary standard. In a masterly essay, *Bangadesher Krishak* (Bengal's Peasantry), he strongly repudiated the claim that the country was prospering under the British rule. He propounds the thesis that the prosperity of the country was not the prosperity of the upper echelons of the society but of the people as a whole, notably the poor peasantry who constitute the vast majority of the population. He says: "Today a lot of row is being heard that we are prospering. Till now we were, it is said, moving towards decay, and under British rule we are becoming increasingly civilised and we are on a road to big prosperity. In this welter of prosperity I have one question to ask—whose prosperity is it? Are Hashim Sheikh and Rama Kaibarta sharing the prosperity? For they are

\* Narayan, Baishakh 1322 (B S)

the people who, toiling under a mid-day sun and wading through knee-deep mud, with a pair of all-rib bullocks and with a borrowed, blunted plough, are raising the crop. Are they coming in for a share of the prosperity? To such a query I would say 'no', not a bit, they are not coming in for a particle of the prosperity. On a real reckoning they constitute the country, the majority of the population being agriculturists."\* Here Bankim is a champion of the peasantry whose miserable conditions he paints with the passion of a reformer. An advanced socialist of today might evince the same sympathy for the peasantry as Bankim did a century ago.

Bankim feels that the Permanent Settlement was at the root of the decline of the Bengal peasantry, that the Settlement ought to have been made with the peasants as the real owners of land, and not with the zamindars who, from their position of vantage, exploited the ryots and reduced them to the utmost degradation. With his first-hand knowledge of administration at all its levels, Bankim knew how the British had blundered at every step in the matter of land legislation and were responsible for the peasantry's infinite woe. The problems of Indian economics had been engaging the attention of the progressive thinkers from Ram Mohan Roy onwards. Dadabhai Naoroji made notable contributions to the field. Later they were taken up and studied in detail by men like R. C. Dutt, Ranade and others and formed the subject-matter of recurrent resolutions of the Indian National Congress when it came into existence. Bankim's works bear testimony to the fact that these problems, mainly the economic drain and the exploitation of the poor, had been agitating his mind too, even though he was not an economist in the real sense of the term.

The ideas of equality filtered down from Rousseau and other European writers into Bankim's young mind. The later development of these ideas into the theories of socialism and communism was also not unknown to Bankim, as his references to these bear out. But nowhere does he mention Marx, possibly because he had not read him. This might have been owing to the lack of an English translation of his works or otherwise. But by the contemporary standard Bankim was notably forward looking in his ideas of equality. In 1879, he brought out his *Samya* meaning

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\* *Short Selections from Bankim Chandra*, K. M. Purakayastha

Equality comprising his three essays on the subject in the *Bangadarshan* and a part of his essay on the Bengal peasantry *Samya* contains the essence of his ideas on equality when he was still in his thirties. But with his progressive trend towards religion and philosophy, some of the ideas underwent change, supposedly the reason why he did not have this book reprinted.

The book recognises three apostles of equality—Buddha, Christ and Rousseau. But it traces back the genesis of the modern socialist and communistic ideas to Rousseau whose theory of communal ownership of land it analyses in detail. Bankim also appears to have been influenced by Mill's theory that children are entitled to only that much of property of an intestate father which is absolutely necessary for their education and livelihood, the rest of it coming under social control. He strongly repudiates the theory of hereditary right accruing through birth and legacy. Birth is accidental, a man born low is no less entitled to happiness than one born rich or aristocratic. To those who have inherited large fortunes through the accident of birth he sounds a note of warning that "the Bengal peasant Paran Mandal is his equal, is his brother" and that "Paran Mandal is a rightful partner of the property he is enjoying all by himself". This was indeed a most daring socialistic doctrine preached in the mid-19th century.

Following Henry Thomas Buckle, Bankim further tries to show how climate, soil and food habit created a leisured class in ancient India, who subsisted on the production surplus of the labouring class whose condition went on deteriorating day after day. Bankim's own contribution to the theory is that the two great religious systems of ancient India, Hinduism and Buddhism, taught indifference to the worldly affairs which only accentuated the class divisions created by the natural and economic causes with the result that a rigid stratification of the Indian society continued to the detriment of the working classes.

To sum up, Bankim takes for granted the fact of natural inequality among men and would not expect complete equality to prevail. What, however, he would object to is artificially created inequality, both social and economic. The caste stratification of ancient India was one such man-made inequality and was, according to Bankim, one of the important reasons of India's decline. Therefore, he insists that equality of rights must be ensued where natural capacity is not lacking. In other words,

'the doors of progress must be open for all,' he says. Ideas of civil, social and economic equality formed the basis of national regeneration, according to Bankim. These ideas as preached by him became in no time the watchwords of a resurgent India.

Last but not least, Bankim's *Kamalakanta* is a unique piece of literary composition. It is laughter and lyricism, patriotism and politics, all rolled into one. It defies traditional literary classification. Its nearest approximation is perhaps De Quincey's *The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. Kamalakanta, the hero of the book, is nothing if not a confirmed opium-eater. But unlike in De Quincey's book he does not need opium to cure his rheumatism or toothache. Opium is a part of his existence. It is his romantic passport to the world of fancy and thought. In many ways, *Kamalakanta* is more romantic than *The Confessions*. Here Bankim's imagination has its fullest play soaring high, unfettered by the artificial restraints imposed by a formal composition.

Kamalakanta, the central figure of the book, is a fascinating character. He is a half-crazy, mysterious opium-eater, who is a poet, philosopher, sociologist, politician, patriot and a confirmed idler. He subsists upon the free milk supplied to him by a milkwoman, Prasanna by name, out of sheer pity for the penniless Brahmin, and also enjoys the patronage of a local zamindar, Nasiram Babu. All the earthly possession Kamalakanta has is a *daptar* or a bundle of papers containing his ravings and fantasies which is supposed to be a sure antidote to insomnia. It seems that Bankim had thoughts and ideas which he could not afford to express through his novels and dissertations but called for a semi-romantic and semi-satirical expression through an unconventional and out-of-the-way character like Kamalakanta who is Bankim himself in an informal garb. There may be difference of opinion about Bankim's other works but not about *Kamalakanta*.

The book is divided into three parts: the first part, *Kamalakanter Daptar*, is a collection of personal essays, some written in a light vein and some, in serious, the second part is *Kamalakanter Patra*, a collection of letters supposed to have been written by Kamalakanta to the editor of the *Bangadarshan*, all sparkling with beautiful humour and jokes, and the third part, *Kamalakanter Jabanbandi*, is Kamalakanta's deposition in a court of law in a cow-theft case and one of Bankim's masterly creations.

Humour and romanticism do not always go together. But Bankim

was both a humorist and a romanticist. Even his gravest compositions are not without their lighter facets. A genial flow of laughter enlivens almost all his novels. But in his humorous sketches collected together in his *Lok Rahasya*, and partly in some other compositions also, he comes out as a bitter satirist exposing ruthlessly the follies and foibles of his age. Here the reformer takes the place of the romantic. What he particularly lashes out at is the contemporary trend of Western imitation and the prevalent snobbery and contempt for the national culture. In one of the sketches entitled "Hymn to the English" he satirises the prevalent slavish mentality thus: "Oh Englishman! I bow to thee. O benevolent ones! Bestow some favours on me. I shall flatter you, speak as you would like me to do, act according to your liking. Only make me a big man. I bow to thee, O giver of honour, give me titles. Whatever you suggest I shall do. I shall wear boots and trousers, put on glasses, dine on tables with forks and spoons. Be pleased with me." The Babu is mercilessly satirised as one who is not only English-educated but blindly imitates the Western dress, manners and customs, is contemptuous of anything national and takes pleasure in mechanically repeating the Western slogans of local self-government and liberty. In an encounter between a monkey and a Babu, the latter accosts the former in English which the unsophisticated ape does not understand. The monkey, therefore, gives him a good taste of the strength of his long tail by throwing it round his neck as a punishment for his snobbishness. In another short composition, Bankim glorifies the ass as an omnipresent animal whose presence can be discerned in many places and institutions and among many people. His *Ramayaner Samalochana* (attributed to an imaginary Western critic) is again a satire on the so-called Western Indologists who, in the name of studying Hindu religion and culture, only misunderstood, misinterpreted and denigrated the same.

In *Lok Rahasya* Bankim is a reformer and therefore ruthless in his satires and sarcasms. *Kamalakanta* too has plenty of the same. But it has also plenty of genial laughter moistened by refreshing touches of poetry and romanticism. Through a fine film of refined humour, the half-dozing, half-awake, opium-addict, laments, teaches and amuses, weaving a rainbow of tears and laughter that touches the deepest chords of the heart. It is more like Lamb's than Swift's.

Transported to a higher plane of imagination through the influence of

opium, Kamalakanta cogitates on the various aspects of life. To him men and women look like being fruits hanging from trees by illusion (*Maya*). The civil service men are like mangoes, imported from abroad but fairly acclimatised in the "native" soil, sour when unripe, sweet when ripe, but sometimes sour even when ripe. While dozing under the influence of opium one evening, Kamalakanta finds innumerable insects flocking round the glass-covered lamp in the drawing room of his zamindar patron. In his opiate dream he hears the insects complaining bitterly that their right to burn themselves in fire is being nullified by the glass cover round the lamp. Kamalakanta feels that human beings are like insects, each having a fire to burn himself in—fire of desire, fire of passion or fascination. Another essay depicts Kamalakanta dozing under the influence of his favourite addiction and wondering if he could win the Battle of Waterloo had he been Napoleon himself. Suddenly hearing a "mew" near by he thinks that the Duke of Wellington must be standing before him in the shape of a cat asking for a doze of opium. But then he realises that it is not the Duke but a cat who has drunk off the milk gifted to him by Prasanna. He makes the traditional manly dash at the cat but is really not angry. The milk does not belong to him, nor even to the milkwoman, but to Mangla the cow, and, therefore, the cat has as much right to it as he. Then from the "mew" of the cat he takes a lesson on socialism. The cat bitterly complains of the injustice the human beings do to the feline species, the have-nots, so to say, by depriving them of their due share of food and drink. The cat mews on "Your stomachs being full, how would you know about our empty ones?" "Hunger," the cat says, "is at the root of all thefts." It continues, "Hang the thief by all means. I have no objection to that. But make it a condition that the judge would fast for three days before punishing the thief. If hunger does not drive the judge to theft, he would be absolutely free to punish the thief."

The second part of the book, containing a number of letters written to the editor of the *Bangadarshan* by Kamalakanta, equally scintillates with wit, humour and satire. In one of them Kamalakanta finds two types of politics enacted before him in real life, the politics of the weak and the politics of the strong. The scene of the drama is oilman Shibu's house where a small boy is taking rice from a plate. A lean and hungry dog comes and makes expectant gestures to have some morsels of food from

the boy's plate. It gradually approaches the boy in a prayerful and solicitous way wagging its tail and at last succeeds in moving the boy's heart to throw some crumbs at it which it at once starts eating. Meanwhile, the lady of the house appears on the scene and throws a menacing piece of stone at the impertinent dog which escapes whining piteously. That is how the politics of prayer and solicitude ends. On the other side of the scene a bullock is munching its fodder merrily when suddenly a fierce-looking bull appears and pushing the bullock aside starts eating the moistened hay and straw. Enraged beyond measure, the lady of the house dashes at the bull even as she did at the dog. But instead of being scared the bull makes a ferocious gesture at her and the poor lady has to run away for fear of her life. The bull then does full justice to the fodder and goes merrily away. That is the politics of the strong.

Kamalakanta's deposition in a court of law is like a small one-act play full of dramatic interest and sparkling with wit and satire. A man has been hauled up in a court on a charge of stealing Prasanna's cow Mangla whose milk has sustained Kamalakanta for a long time. Prasanna is the complainant and Kamalakanta, the witness, supposedly on Prasanna's side. A war of words and wit ensues between Kamalakanta and Prasanna's lawyer. The cross examination of Kamalakanta by the lawyer proves to be a most dramatic exchange, the latter trying to have the cow identified by Kamalakanta and the former persistently avoiding the issue through his witty evasions and biting remarks. The whole of the cross examination is a sparkling piece of composition enlivened by a delightful flow of humour and the most life-like representation of a court scene. Through apparent irrelevancies Kamalakanta propounds his thesis that Prasanna is not the real owner of the cow, because she only sells her milk but never drinks it, but that the person who actually drinks the cow's milk is its real owner. When confronted by Prasanna out of court Kamalakanta astounds her and others present by urging that she should hand over the cow to the thief. Whether the Sanskrit word "go" means earth or cow, he philosophises, it is to be enjoyed by thieves. That is history from Alexander down to the present day. Therefore, the half-lunatic philosopher-gypsy poses the question. "If the right of conquest is a recognised right, does not the right of theft deserve to be so recognised?" Concluding, he calls upon the milkwoman to follow history and international law by letting the thief get away with the cow.

*Amar Durgotsab*, the eleventh essay of *Kamalakanter Daptar*, is a remarkable composition in many ways and needs special mention. It is here that Bankim for the first time conceives the motherland as Mother, an idea that finds full flowering in his *Anandamath*, as we shall see in the following chapter. It is here again that we find the idea of the *Vande Mataram* song in rudiment—possibly the hymn was composed at about the same time as this. At a vague and inchoate stage of our nationalism, Kamalakanta comes out as a real patriot, giving himself up in this ecstatic composition to a rapturous worship of Goddess Durga conceived as the Motherland.

On the first day of the annual Durga worship ceremony, Kamalakanta has an overdose of opium and goes to see the Durga image. Then he sees a vision which he describes thus: "I saw a vision, all on a sudden the Sea of Time was flowing fast extending endlessly in all directions and it was on a small raft that I was floating on the waters. In that eternal and unending darkness right on the wavy sea swept by wind, there were stars, rising on surface, fading out and re-rising. I felt myself terribly alone and feeling alone, began to feel nervous, helpless, motherless and began to shout 'Mother, O Mother'. Indeed I came on a quest of Mother to the Sea of Time. Where are you Mother? Where is my Mother? In this rough high sea where are you? Suddenly divine music burst into my ears, the horizon all round became illuminated with the flicker of a blue bright light as in sunshine in the morning, a gentle and refreshing breeze began to blow and I saw on the surface of the wavy waters at the far end of the perspective a golden figure of Goddess Durga as on the first day of Her annual worship. Yes, I could recognise Her as my Mother, indeed my Mother—my Motherland—this earthen and earthy deity bedecked with countless jewels but hidden away in the abysmal depth of Time.

"The deity sank in the Sea of Time in the midst of that eternal darkness, and with that darkness and the roar of waters of the wavy sea the whole universe became enveloped. Then with my two hands clasped and tears gushing out of my eyes I began to pray, 'Emerge, O Mother, emerge from the sea. We pledge our word this time that in future we shall be worthy children, we shall tread the right path—we shall vindicate your Motherhood. Emerge, O Mother, again! We shall now forget ourselves, we shall bear all the love for the brethren, we shall achieve the best for others, we shall discard sin, indolence and sensuality. Emerge,



O Mother, emerge, I am weeping all alone and weeping and weeping  
I am on the point of losing my sight, O Mother'

"The Mother did not vouchsafe Her appearance Would She not do  
it any more?"\*

*Kamalakanta*, in short, is a rhapsodic composition keyed to a high pitch of imagination. It contains humour of the most sparkling type, satire on the follies and foibles of the age, progressive ideas on the socio-polity and social justice and above all a magnificent outburst of patriotism raised to the level of religious fervour. *Kamalakanta* is the first conscious patriot of Bengali literature, he is also its first socialist philosopher.

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\* *Short Selections from Bankim Chandra*, K. M. Purakayastha

## The Mantra and the Monastery

**B**ANKIM'S THREE novels, *Anandamath*, *Devī Chaudhurani*, and *Sitaram*, published between 1882 and 1887, when his mind was occupied with the deeper problems of society and life, are indeed remarkable from the nation-building point of view. According to some of his critics, they are the crowning achievement of his life. But others contend that they are more of a message than of an art. They are thus the most controversial creations of Bankim.

*Anandamath*, which was begun in about the year 1880 and appeared in book form in 1882, has a twilight period of Bengal's history as its background.

The period from the Battle of Plassey to the days of Hastings' reforms, a period of "power without responsibility", of "civilisation without mercy", was one of the darkest in India's history. *Anandamath* takes us back to those anarchical days of the 1770's when, under a curious dual system, the Nawab was the titular head, while the East India Company was functioning as Dewan. The Nawab was powerless to protect his subjects while the Company whose only function was revenue collection cared little for the maintenance of law and order. The result was that under the dual system there was dual oppression on the people—by the Nawab's as well as the Company's servants. Against their ruthless rapacity, the people had no protection or appeal. Many left their hearth and home and became vagabonds or plunderers. To add to their misery came the famine of 1770 which was so terrible that people not only left their households but sold their children, ate leaves and grass, and even fed upon dead bodies, according to one historian. Gleig says that the year 1770 brought upon Bengal, in addition to the other miseries under which it groaned, "the heavy scourge of a famine." "The loss of life occasioned by the

calamity was fearful, it has been estimated at one third of the population of the province" \*

It is in this background that Bankim places his novel *Anandamath*. The main historical factor on which the novel has been built up is what is known as the *Sannyasi* rebellion. These *Sannyasis* were roving pilgrims from the up-country visiting in large numbers the various districts of Bengal, notably its northern districts. Hunter calls them "a set of lawless bandits" who "under the pretence of religious pilgrimage have been accustomed to traverse the chief parts of Bengal, begging, stealing and plundering wherever they go" \*\*. During the famine their ranks appear to have swollen by the starving people. According to Warren Hastings, the *Sannyasis* were roving pilgrims having neither homes nor families but were hardy and bold, enthusiastic to a degree surpassing credit and held in high veneration by the people. Side by side there were Muslim *Fakirs* too who had organised themselves on the pattern of the Hindu *Sannyasis* and sometimes united in their common action against the Company's force †. According to Dr R. C. Majumdar, "the movement was initiated by the anti-British activities of two different groups, Hindu *Sannyasis* and Muslim *Fakirs*, but they gained momentum from the support they received from the starving peasantry, dispossessed zamindars and disbanded soldiers" ‡. The *Sannyasis* were thus roving pilgrims from upper India who annually visited many of the northern Bengal districts, sometimes coming down upon lower Bengal and indulged in loot and pillage. In the process they came into serious clashes with the Company's forces in which the British were often very severely mauled. Out of these rebel gypsies Bankim makes a magnificent band of patriots who spearheaded a revolt against the unjust and tyrannical order of the day. The raw material supplied by history has received at the hands of Bankim a splendid transfiguration. Bankim has departed from history to the extent that the *Sannyasis* were not the band of patriots he has depicted in *Anandamath*. But here Bankim is not writing an historical novel, as he himself says, he is producing a parable of patriotism on a historical canvas. The historical basis of the novel pertaining to the *Sannyasi* insurrection

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\* *Memours of Warren Hastings*

\*\* *Annals of Rural Bengal*

† *Sannyasi and Fakir Raiders in Bengal*, J. M. Ghosh

‡ *History of Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. I

and the great famine of 1770 is correct. So is the picture of the contemporary society as depicted in it. As for the rest, Bankim's imagination has had a free play. His purpose is not the photography of history but a rich imaginative, transformation of the historical material to suit his own purpose. He cannot, therefore, be expected to vouch for historicity in all details.

The book begins with a short prologue which is highly suggestive in itself. In the fearful silence of a dense, dark, nocturnal forest, two unknown voices converse in a mysterious manner, one offering to lay down his life for the fulfilment of his vow and the other demanding devotion of him. Without personālisng these two shadowy figures, the author suggests in dim outlines that the story that follows is one of a grim vow and grimmer dedication. Then the story begins.

The village Padachinha lies completely famine-ravaged hushed in the dreadfulneſs of death and destitution. Though a zamindar, Mahendra Singh finds himself alone in the midst of the all-round desolation and goes out in search of food in the company of his wife Kalyani and their little daughter Sukumari. Through strange vicissitudes the husband and the wife become separated. Kalyani falls into the clutches of dacoits but manages to escape and happens to come under the protection of Satyananda, the chief of Anandamath, the Monastery of Bliss.

Far removed from outside view, Anandamath, a monastery of *Sannyasi*-patriots, stands hidden in a dense forest. A huge, partly dilapidated but sprawling building, it is the haunt of the *Santans* or the children of the Mother, as the *Sannyasis* call themselves. While Kalyani receives refuge there, Satyananda orders one of his lieutenants, Bhavananda, to go in search of her husband.

The Company's revenue is being sent to Calcutta escorted by 50 armed sepoys commanded by an Englishman. Looting and dacoity being the order of the day, they arrest Mahendra accidentally passing that way as a dacoit. A short while after Bhavananda happening to come that way is also captured and is bound up along with Mahendra. Bhavananda now plans to escape and free Mahendra too. Fortunately, at a particular place there is all of a sudden a fierce armed attack by innumerable *Sannyasis* on the Company's sepoys under the leadership of Jivananda, another lieutenant of Satyananda. The sepoys are completely defeated, the English commander is killed and the revenue looted.

On his way to Anandamath, Mahendra strongly remonstrates with Bhavananda on the pillage and loot by the *Sannyasis*. But Bhavananda puzzles the sullen and sulking Mahendra by singing the moving hymn of *Vande Mataram*. He sings

“Mother, I bow to thee!  
 Rich with thy hurrying streams,  
 Bright with thy orchard gleams,  
 Cool with thy winds of delight,  
 Dark fields waving, Mother of might,  
 Mother free ”

Completely bewildered, Mahendra queries, “What Mother?”

Bhavananda replies by singing

“Glory of moonlight dreams,  
 Over thy branches and lordly streams,  
 Glad in thy blossoming trees,  
 Mother, giver of ease,  
 Laughing low and sweet!  
 Mother, I kiss thy feet  
 Speaker sweet and low!  
 Mother, to thee I bow ”

(From *Bankim-Tilak-Dayananda* by Sri Aurobindo  
 See Appendix 1)

When Mahendra wonders that it is the Motherland and not the Mother, the *Sannyasi* says: “We recognise no other mother. Mother and Motherland are more than heaven itself. We have neither father, nor mother, nor brother, nor friend, nor wife, nor son, nor house, nor home. We have her alone, the richly-watered, richly-fruited, cool with delightful winds, rich with the harvests .” \*

“Mahendra saw the robber shedding tears as he sang ‘Who,’ in wonder he asked, ‘Who are you?’ Bhavananda replied, ‘We are the children.’ ‘What is meant by children,’ asked Mahendra, ‘Whose

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\* The quotations used in this chapter are from the English translation of *Anandamath* by Aurobindo and Barindra Nath Ghosh

children are you?" Bhavananda replied, "The children of the Mother'." Doubt was still lingering in Mahendra's mind. How could the Mother be worshipped by pillage, plunder and killing? Bhavananda explains that since the Nawab has failed to give protection to his subjects against oppression, tyranny and anarchy, he has forfeited his right to the revenue and that the money, therefore, does not rightfully belong to an incompetent and powerless Nawab.

At Anandamath itself Satyananda receives Mahendra cordially and shows him round the different manifestations of the Mother. First, he shows him the image of Vishnu holding an enchanting image of the Mother on his lap. Then he is shown other representations of the Mother.

"The ascetic (Satyananda) took Mahendra into another room. There he saw an image of Jagaddhatrī, Protectress of the World, wonderful, perfect, rich with every ornament. 'Who is she,' asked Mahendra. The Brahmachari replied, 'The Mother as she was.' 'What is that,' asked Mahendra. 'She trampled under feet the elephants of the forest and all wild beasts and in the haunt of the wild beasts she erected her lotus throne. She was covered with every ornament, full of laughter and beauty. She was in hue like the young sun, splendid with all opulence and empire. Bow down to the Mother.'

"Mahendra saluted reverently the image of the Motherland as the Protectress of the World. The Brahmachari then showed him a dark underground passage and said 'Come this way.' Mahendra with some alarm followed him. In the dark room in the bowels of the earth an insufficient light entered from some unperceived outlet. By that light he saw an image of Kali. The Brahmachari said, 'Look on the Mother as she now is.' Mahendra said, 'It is Kali.' 'Yes, Kali, enveloped in darkness, full of blackness and gloom. She is stripped of all and, therefore, naked. Today the whole country is a burial ground, therefore, is the Mother garlanded with skulls. Her own God she tramples under feet. Alas, my Mother.' Tears began to stream from the ascetic's eyes. 'Why,' asked Mahendra, 'has she in her hands the club and the skull?' 'We are the children, we have only just given weapons into our Mother's hands.'

"Mahendra said '*Vande Mataram*' and bowed down to Kali.

"The ascetic said, 'Come by this way' and began to ascend another

underground passage Suddenly the rays of the morning sun shone in their eyes and from every side the sweet-voiced family of birds shrilled in song In a wide temple built in stone of marble, they saw a beautifully fashioned image of the ten-armed Goddess made in gold, laughing and radiant in the early sun The ascetic saluted the image and said, 'This is the Mother as she shall be Her ten arms are extended towards the ten regions and they bear many a force imaged in her manifold weapons, her enemies are trampled under her feet and the lion on which her foot rests is busy destroying the foe Behold her with the regions for her arms wielder of manifold weapons, trampler of her foes, with the lion-heart for the steed of her riding, on her right Lakshmi as prosperity, on her left Speech, the giver of learning and science, Kartikeya as her strength and Ganesh as success Come let us bow down to the Mother'

"The two men bowed down with awe and love and when they rose Mahendra asked in broken voice, 'When shall I see this image of the Mother?' 'When all the Mother's sons,' replied the Brahmachari, 'learn to call the Mother by that name, on that day the Mother will be gracious to us' "

At a solemn ceremony Satyananda initiates Mahendra into the *Santan* cult which enjoins certain grim vows to be fulfilled Unless and until the Mother is liberated from tyranny and misrule, oppression and irreligion, a *Santan* is required to abjure all his family ties including those with his wife and children, and all wealth and enjoyment, he has to give up completely all sensual desire, has to fight with the enemies in the cause of religion and never to turn back from the battle field He has also to give up his caste consideration since the *Santans* recognise no caste distinction Mahendra thus becomes a complete convert and under Satyananda's order goes back to his village home to build a fort and manufacture arms and ammunition.

Human interest is added to a story, otherwise a grim saga of a crusading determination, by two interesting side episodes skilfully linked up with the main plot Jivananda has left behind his wife Shanti in a village to join the *Santans* But having been brought up since her infancy in a masculine way, Shanti is too bold for an ordinary woman and comes to Anandamath in the garb of a young man with the avowed intention of helping her husband in his great mission, and not hindering him in any way Her disguise, however, is seen through by Satyananda Shanti

is a bold departure from the ordinary norms of Indian womanhood, and it has been said that foreign influence has gone into the making of her character. But however daring and adventurous she might be, basically she is an Indian woman—in her complete dedication to her husband and his cause.

In another episode we see how even a *Santan* under the grimmest possible vow is after all a human being and may have a fall from his rigid rules of conduct. Bhavananda, Satyananda's lieutenant, falls in love with Kalyani and makes amorous advances to her, though unsuccessfully. For this sinful deviation from a *Santan's* strict code of conduct, he, however, makes amends by sacrificing his life in a battle that follows, with *Vande Mataram* on his lips.

The *Santans* have two major confrontations with the English against and their sepoys. Though better equipped, the latter cannot stand the wild ferocity of the *Santans* for whom *Vande Mataram* is a "do or die" battle cry. In one of the conflicts Captain Thomas loses his life, in another, Major Edwardes with all his troops is completely crushed. The *Santans* thus win a great victory. The cry of *Vande Mataram* echoes and re-echoes on thousands of lips. A crushing blow has been dealt at the reign of anarchy and irreligion. Satyananda, the triumphant *Sannyasi*-general, now plans to consolidate a Hindu regime.

Then comes a most unexpected finale turning victory into an act of renunciation. At the moment of the supreme success comes a mysterious person, Physician or Doctor, as he is called, who calls upon Satyananda to renounce the fruits of his victory and cease dreaming of a Hindu kingdom. The Physician then urges Satyananda to come away with him to the Himalayas. Satyananda does not think his mission complete until he has established a just order and is shocked beyond measure at the call for renunciation. But the Physician says that plunder and robbery, however patriotic the motive might be, are basically sinful and cannot lead to the deliverance of the country or to the setting up of a regime based on religion or ethics. "The Doctor said, 'Satyananda, don't be broken-hearted. Due to your error of judgment you gathered money through robbery and thus won the war. Out of sin does not come pure achievement. So you will necessarily fail to rescue your country. Moreover, whatever will happen will be for the best. Unless the English rule the land, there is no chance of the renaissance of the eternal religion. Listen



patiently I shall explain to you as it has been seen and understood by the ancient sages. The worship of 330 million deities is not eternal religion, that is an inferior popular religion. The true Hindu religion is based on knowledge, not action. Through English education our people attaining knowledge of the material world will also be capable of understanding inner knowledge so long as the Hindus do not become wise, worthy and strong, the British rule will endure.

“Renunciation came and took away success”

*Anandamath* is thus no ordinary novel, it is a novel with a purpose. From the purely artistic point of view the novel may be said to suffer from several defects. For instance, it depends too much on accidental circumstances. Some of the characters have been too much idealised. It also has plenty of didacticism. But here it is the message that throws art into the background. Plot, character and other details, less pronounced in themselves than in other Bankim fictions, are all subjected to the keynote of the story—the deliverance of the Motherland. And for fulfilling that great mission, it calls for supreme sacrifice under a rigorous vow of renunciation, unless and until the Mother’s badge of slavery is removed.

According to some quarters, *Anandamath* might have been inspired by the secret revolutionary activities of Vasudev Balwant Phadke of Maharashtra\* whom Dr R. C. Majumdar calls “the father of Indian militant nationalism”. Phadke was captured in 1879 and transported for life in 1880, that is, about the time Bankim had just begun writing *Anandamath*. The story of Phadke’s trial came out in the Calcutta Press and also his life history was published in a Bengali magazine.

Whatever the source of inspiration might have been, it is evident that in writing it, Bankim was actuated by the purest of patriotic motives. Bankim was of the view that patriotism is a modern virtue, a gift of the English, and was lacking among the ancient Hindus. In *Anandamath*, therefore, he creates that modern urge of patriotism through ancient religious symbols. The historical *Sannyasis* whose insurrectionary activities form the background of the story were no patriots, nor were they inspired by the sublime sentiment of national deliverance, even though in an isolated manner they might have considered the English their enemies.

\* *Anandamath Utsa*, Chittaranjan Bandyopadhyaya, *Jugantar*, Puja Number, 1374 (B S)

But Bankim has invested them with the glory and glamour of modern patriotism suggestive of European national cohesion and based on organised collective action. The sturdy *Sannyasis* are unlike India's pacific ascetics. One more point to be noted is this. Initially the Mother is represented as sitting on Vishnu's lap. The *Santan* cult, according to Satyananda, is Vaishnavic in the sense that the *Santans* worship Vishnu but for that matter they do not believe in Vaishnavic non-violence. This is an attempt at a synthesis between Shakti worship and Vishnu worship, a new cult in which the application of force for the deliverance of the Motherland is not ruled out. Vishnu himself as the Preserver of the World is symbolic of strength.

*Anandamath* ends on a note of submission to, rather acceptance of, the British rule. This has been attributed by some critics to Bankim's inhibition as a government servant. This may not be correct. Bankim personally believed, as many others of that age did, that a period of British rule was necessary, for the country's rejuvenation, specially in the field of science and materialism, and he welcomed it to that extent. But he never thought foreign rule to be the last word in his country's current history. If therefore, one goes deep into the Doctor's exhortation to Satyananda in the epilogue to *Anandamath*, one would see that the submission to the British rule is only temporary, whether it is an inevitability or a necessity and that the promise of the final deliverance is implicit in it. At its best the British rule is to Bankim a means to an end—a means of quickening the country's rejuvenation through the acquisition of modern knowledge and as a result of the impact of a new civilisation from the West.

Allegorically interpreted, the revolt in *Anandamath* may be intended to have been aimed against the newly established British rule, rather than against a powerless Nawab who had failed to protect his subjects against the oppression of his own and the Company's servants. In every line of the book the author's fervent patriotism and irrepressible urge for national deliverance burn bright. That perhaps is the reason why, despite his appreciation of the benefits of the British rule, he could not altogether avoid official displeasure for writing *Anandamath*. At a time when the country was steeped in frustration and despondency and the idea of freedom was literally inconceivable, *Anandamath* brought before the reading public a sturdy sense of patriotism, a new and thrilling urge in an era of utter political prostration. *Anandamath* foreshadowed and, as we shall

see later, paved the way for some of India's subsequent struggles for freedom

One more point of note in this connection is this. In the epilogue to the book, the Physician says that robbery and looting could not achieve the noble objective of national deliverance and thus denounces bad means even for achieving good ends. By saying that "out of sin does not come pure achievement," he only stresses moral values and the attainment of knowledge both mental and material for nation-building and national deliverance. Thus, while not ruling out force as a means of political struggle or aid to statecraft, Bankim stresses the importance of the cultivation of mental and moral values to strengthen a nation's basic structure.

The *Vande Mataram* hymn used by the *Santans* of *Anandamath* as an incantation as well as a rallying cry is a priceless possession of the nation today.

Before Bankim wrote *Vande Mataram* in a moment of patriotic inspiration, the Bengali literature was proud to have had a number of very moving songs of great patriotic appeal. In his *Padmini Upakhyan* (1858), poet Rangalal Bandyopadhyaya wrote one such song beginning thus "Who wants to live in degradation without freedom? Who wants to wear round his legs the chains of slavery?" Hem Chandra Bandyopadhyaya, another eminent poet, wrote in 1872 his *Bharat Sangit* which is a stirring call to the nation to wake up from slumber. It begins thus

"Sing, O my clarionet, Sing to these words ·  
Every one is free in this world,

India alone lieth asleep "

Another remarkable national song, composed by Satyendra Nath Tagore, elder brother of Rabindranath Tagore, begins thus. "Children of India, sing together and in complete unison the glory that India is." It was sung at several sessions of the Hindu Mela or Chaitra Mela started from 1867 onwards by a fiery patriot named Nabagopal Mitra with the purpose of rousing national feelings. Indeed the Mela itself occasioned an outburst of patriotic songs of the most fervent type. The poets and intellectuals had started idealising India through their lyrical effusions. Satyendra Nath's song has been described in some quarters as India's

first national song It was commended by Bankim himself In a book review dealing with the merits of the Hindu religion, he says that Satyendra Nath's great song should be sung all over India and by twenty crore Indians \*

It was in this background of a lyrical outburst of an intense patriotic feeling that Bankim wrote *Vande Mataram* which was India's unofficial national anthem for about 40 years before independence and has been one of her two recognised national songs since the attainment of freedom When exactly the song was composed is not definitely known But from all evidences it appears to have been composed towards the latter part of 1875 \*\* It was a song composed by itself, having nothing to do with any book Bankim prized it very much but left it unpublished, for the time being Reportedly he had it set to music by a well-known musician of those days, Jadu Bhatta, and circles close to him seem to have had knowledge of the song It echoes admirably the sentiments expressed in *Amar Durgotsab* (already referred to) Both reveal strikingly similar sentiments and ideas, indicating that the two were probably written at about the same time Later on, when Bankim wrote *Anandamath*, he put it very appropriately on the lips of the *Santans* with whom it became a sacred incantation The way he has used it in *Anandamath* shows his sense of artistic propriety, the song does not sound like an insertion, it has become integral to the natural logic of the theme The mixed Bengali and Sanskrit diction of the song makes it resonant with a rhythmical quality that moves one to the very depth of one's heart Its solemn music soothes as well as inspires

The song's most distinctive feature is the conception it embodies of the Motherland as the Mother Land, the Mother, is an ancient idea not unknown to the Indians of old The productive and plentiful earth is often linked to the quality of motherhood in the ancient texts Besides it has been said that mother and the motherland are more glorious than the heaven itself But it was perhaps left to Bankim to go further than this to conceive the Motherland as the Mother in terms of the modern patriotic spirit and give it a concrete, visual representation as Goddess Durga Prior to Bankim it was perhaps Satyendra Nath Tagore who adumbrated

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\* *Bankim's Works*, Sahitya Sansad

\*\* *Vande Mataram*, G C Roy, *Jugantar*, August 15, 1959

a similar idea in the song referred to above wherein he speaks of "the children of India" India is described as the "Mother of heroes" and the poet asks, "Why are you afraid of brightening up the face of the Mother?" The rudiments of the conception might have been present in some other contemporary compositions as well (B C Pal refers to an opera named *Bharat Mata* said to have been staged those days) \* But all these were apparently in vague and general terms without the inspiring, exhilarating, quality of the tangible, perceptible, image-making of the Mother of Bankim's conception. It was left to Bankim to refashion the Mother-Goddess mythology in terms of the modern virtue of patriotism. Perhaps it would be too much to read metaphysics into the song or to interpret it as the Deity immanent in the Motherland. Bankim was least metaphysical. His entire system of philosophy shows that he was a practical idealist and not an abstract speculator.

The four-day worship of Goddess Durga, which is the most important religious festival of Bengal, attended with magnificent pomp and ceremony, impressed Bankim very much—it was a part of the annual rituals at his ancestral home at Kanthalpara. In the same Goddess again he discerned the attributes which, in his conception, a country, in the present case, his own, should possess to be happy and prosperous. It was easy for him, therefore, to identify the Motherland with the Mother-Goddess. Thus he not only gave the object of his adoration a visible, accessible and concretely externalised expression but also imparted to it all the sanctity and solemnity associated with a religious worship.

*Vande Mataram* is an invocation to the Mother as she shall be whose radiant image was shown to Mahendra by Satyananda in *Anandamath*. Bankim represents her as Durga, worshipped annually in thousands of Bengali homes. She represents all the attributes necessary for a country or a people to be happy and prosperous. Her ten arms are well-weaponed and spread in ten directions indicating her sway. With the lion as her steed, she is herself engaged in demolishing Asura or the demon representing the forces of evil. Her two daughters, Lakshmi and Saraswati, represent respectively wealth and learning, and her two sons, Ganesh and Kartikeya, symbolise success and strength. Bankim begins the invocation by describing the Mother as well-watered and well-fruited meaning

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\* *My Life and Times*

thereby that productive abundance is the prime necessity for a state or a country. Then the Mother has "the sharpness of sword raised in twice seventy million hands" as her strength and defence. She is "life in our body", she is the source of the knowledge, conduct, love and faith of her children and it is her image that the children raise in every temple. Apparently Bankim is identifying every individual with the country, the countrymen deriving their life, strength and sustenance, their physical as well as moral qualities, from the country, that is, its climate and environment and traditions. Indeed, the Mother represents the ethos of the people as a whole. The song evokes the deepest patriotic emotion, because it seeks a complete identification between the country and its inhabitants for the avowed purpose of the advancement of its cause. Noticeably Bankim stresses not only the mental, moral and productive aspects of the country but also her defensive strength which is basic to statehood. It is reasonable to suppose, therefore, that in this song, Bankim is thinking of the country not as a mere geographical unit or emotional symbol but in terms of complete statehood comprising territory as well as people, with all their mental, moral and physical qualities at play. Unlike political thinkers, who generally ascribe masculine qualities to the state, Bankim conceives the country in terms of motherhood, attributing to her the feminine qualities of beauty and productivity but not without the manly virtues of vigour and strength. And such a blending of opposite qualities he could easily have in the concept of Goddess Durga. Not many anthems in the world's hymnology can claim the distinctiveness of *Vande Mataram*. Most national songs like *La Marseilles* only inspire, *Vande Mataram* both inspires and soothes.

Yet in many ways *Vande Mataram* is also perhaps the most controversial national anthem and had a chequered history before being finally recognised as one of India's two national anthems. Initially it was much misunderstood and more misrepresented by foreigners, perhaps not without political bias. It was interpreted by some European writers as a song of vengeance, one addressed to Kali, Goddess of Death and Destruction. One of them calls it an invocation to "the terrible Goddess" whether Durga or as Kali. Even the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* could not look upon it as anything but Bengal's personification as a spiritualised Kali. How misinformed and even biased these interpretations are can be easily seen.

*Vande Mataram* is a patriotic song, pure and simple, an invocation to the Motherland personified as Goddess Durga, whose worship has an instinctive appeal to the Bengali mind. It is neither a song of vengeance, nor a grim ritualistic charm, as many foreigners seem to have supposed. Bankim was no idolater, indeed he believed that idolatry was the least advanced form of worship. Yet he was also aware that mere abstractions were not enough to kindle man's imagination, that to draw out his finest emotions, there must be a visible representation of the object of his devotion in the form of symbols and images. Indeed it is not in the hymn only but in *Anandamath* itself that we find the Mother, that is, the Motherland, represented symbolically first as Jagaddhatrī or the Mother as she was, then as Kali or the Mother as she is and finally as Durga or the Mother as she shall be. These are nothing but allegorical representations of the Mother's dignified state in the past, her current degradation and her radiant future after her deliverance by the *Santans* through their grim self-dedication. Bankim must have felt that nothing moved the Indian mind so powerfully as did religion, hence he chose religious imagery for representing a modern patriotic urge.

Bankim seems to have had a prophetic fore knowledge about the future of *Vande Mataram*. He is said to have felt that in the following 20 to 30 years' time, people would go mad with the song. That is exactly what happened. In less than 30 years from the date of the publication of the song, people did go mad with it, and that was during the movement against the Bengal partition in 1905. How the song fared during the interregnum is interesting to see. The several political agitations which took place in Bankim's lifetime did not witness the singing of *Vande Mataram*. But although the song had not attained immediate political currency, it surely did receive appreciative attention. This would be evident from its inclusion in the musical section of the Tagore family journal called *Balak* in 1885\* and the echo of this song in a poem written by Hem Chandra Bandyopadhyaya in commemoration of the 1886 Congress at Calcutta\*\* where Rabindranath Tagore sang a different song. It was for the first time sung at the 12th Congress session at Calcutta in 1896 by Rabindranath Tagore. Eyewitness accounts

\* *Mantrer Janma*, B. Dutta, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, Sunday Supplement, Aswin 12, 1376 (B.S.)

\*\* *Mukti Sandhane Bharat*, J. C. Bagal

have it that the Poet's sweet but powerful voice reverberated in the whole pandal moving the audience visibly and transporting them to a higher plane of patriotism.

Till then of a limited currency, *Vande Mataram* became extremely popular during the movement against the Bengal partition and was taken up by the rest of India in its wake. During those tempestuous days of patriotic upheaval, it became bleeding Bengal's rallying cry against injustice, the condensed expression of its agonised soul. *Vande Mataram* was sung at the mammoth Calcutta Town Hall meeting of August 7, 1905, where the famous boycott resolution was adopted and the Swadeshi movement thus inaugurated. On October 16, the day on which the partition of Bengal came into effect, no hearth fire was lit in Bengal as a mark of protest, while batches of volunteers went about singing the exalting song. People in their thousands all over the province marched to the nearest streams to perform ablution and tied round one another's wrist silken threads of unity and fraternity in the midst of the deafening shouts of *Vande Mataram*. The Government scented sedition and came down heavily upon the song banning its public singing. But many students, determined to undo the grievous wrong of the partition, cheerfully defied the ban and faced expulsion from schools and colleges. Describing the British prejudice against *Vande Mataram*, Mr. A C Majumdar says: "Like the red rag to the bull the innocent expression *Vande Mataram* became almost intolerable to a certain class of officials. Some interpreted it to mean 'Seize and beat the monkey', others suspected it to be a secret watchword for committing violence; while in point of fact, the harmless expression coined by a novelist more than a decade before meant nothing but—I salute Thee, my Motherland" \*

The song was under a strict ban in Barisal, a town of the newly created province of East Bengal and Assam, where the Bengal Provincial Conference was due to be held in April, 1906, during the peak period of the anti-partition agitation. There the police made an unprovoked and ruthless lathi-charge on a procession led by Surendra Nath Banerjee and others. Like seasoned passive resisters, the processionists faced the ordeal calmly with but *Vande Mataram* on their lips. Blood was shed for the Motherland with *Vande Mataram* alone to inspire and console the martyrs. Chitta-

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\* *Indian National Evolution*



ranjan Guha Thakurta, a youthful participant in the Barisal protest, who narrowly escaped first being beaten, and then drowned, to death by the police, recounts the incident thus "When I first shouted *Vande Mataram* I was ready to be shot dead by the Gurkhas, but instead of that, lathis after lathis began to fall on my body like hailstones As soon as I shouted *Vande Mataram* I felt a great power passing through my veins The shower of lathi blows that fell on every part of my body seemed to me to be the blessings of my Motherland \*\*\* But Mr Guha Thakurta also recounts how the inspiration the song gave him was purely non-violent evoking in him no malice or anger Indeed, in many ways the anti-partition movement was among the first experiments in non-violent passive resistance practised on a mass scale and set the pattern for the country's subsequent struggles for freedom

The Swadeshi movement which came in the wake of the partition of Bengal was an upheaval of an unprecedented nature and generated a tremendous enthusiasm A *Vande Mataram* Group of volunteers was formed who went about singing the song from place to place, spreading the spirit of Swadeshi and urging the people to boycott foreign goods A newspaper called *Vande Mataram* was started by B C Pal whose motto was "India for Indians" Aurobindo himself came to be associated with it It was not a negative movement merely to unsettle the settled fact of the partition—it had a positive content It stressed constructive patriotism, self-help, boycott of foreign goods, indigenous industrialisation, importance of national education and national culture and values In other words it brought about an all-round reawakening in Bengal, social, political, cultural and industrial

Bengal was bursting out in an efflorescence of songs and music Tagore gave expression to that fine spirit of patriotism in some remarkable songs he composed during that period, in most of which the Motherland is conceived as the Mother To quote Ramsay Macdonald, Bengal was "creating India by song and worship" and "clothing her with queenly garments" \*\* The seeds of nationalism sown during the previous century were sprouting out, Bengal was transforming the love of the Motherland into a religion And behind all this magnificent outburst there was the influence of Bankim's thoughts and ideas and above all his

\* *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, October 27, 1937

\*\* *The Awakening of India*

*Vande Mataram* hymn His idea of the Motherland as embodied in the song was catching on

The spirit of the Swadeshi movement did not remain confined to Bengal, it spread elsewhere in the country Its impact was felt in U P, C P, Punjab, Bombay and other places, and got mixed up with the streams of nationalism emanating from those areas The movement against the partition of Bengal was provincial in origin but national in content Through it Bengal was idealising the Motherland, that is, India Bengal's nationalism thus got linked up with the all-India nationalism

In the first instance the *Vande Mataram* song and the whole Swadeshi spirit accorded well with the country's new, emerging mood, the new nationalism or extremism as it has been called, which was then developing all over the country and of which the accredited leaders were Lal, Bal, Pal and Aurobindo Ghosh Their strong reaction against the moderation of the elder politicians is too well-known to need detailed mention here The early signs of a split between the two schools of nationalism, the new and the old, were visible at the Calcutta Congress of 1906, in many ways a very memorable session The split which was cleverly averted did take place in the following year at Surat

The new nationalism was attuned to the spirit of Bankim, and "the cry of *Vande Mataram* (Hail Mother) become a symbol of a new movement not only in Bengal but all over India" \* The new cry is *Vande Mataram* (Hail Mother) The old cry was "Hail Britannia! Long live the Emperor!"\*\* Aurobindo and B C Pal imparted to *Vande Mataram* a mystic awe calling it a *mantra* and incantation And a *mantra* is not a mere sound but a force said Pal

The 1906 Shivaji festival at Calcutta was a very important occasion which brought about a meeting of mind between Bengal and Maharashtra When on that occasion the *Vande Mataram* cry was profusely raised, Tilak made the following remark "The cry of *Vande Mataram* with which you have greeted me and my friend Kharpade this morning is not unknown to us as it has been adopted by the Marhattas too and the words *Vande Mataram* can now be found inscribed on the temple of the great Shivaji at Raigarh"† Tilak who did most to spread Bengal's Swadeshi

\* *Rise and Growth of Militant Indian Nationalism*, Buch

\*\* *Ibid*

† *Hindustan Standard*, October 31, 1937

fervour to the farthest corner of the country said in a different context "I regard India as my Motherland and my Goddess"\* The Motherland-Goddess idea was gaining rapid momentum

Originally written about Bengal, *Vande Mataram* gained all-India currency at the hands of both the new nationalists and the old. If with the former it was an impassioned cry of patriotism, it was not long before the latter also took it up as their most inspiring patriotic watchword. Already sung before the Calcutta session of the Congress in 1896, the song came up very much on its all-India forum. The two Congress sessions of 1905 and 1906 were important in that they adopted strong resolutions protesting against the dismemberment of the province of Bengal. The 1906 session of Calcutta not only did so but also supported boycott and Swadeshi, thus making Bengal's cause India's very own. "The cause of Bengal was made India's cause"\*\*\* At the 1905 session of the Congress, where Gokhale spoke feelingly of Bengal's woes, Surendra Nath Banerjee moved the resolution against partition amidst shouts of *Vande Mataram* and described vividly the torture the *Vande Mataram* singers in Bengal were being put to. In the session of 1906, attended by a record number of delegates from all parts of the country, *Vande Mataram* was sung by a girls choir with the audience standing, while Rashbehari Ghosh, Chairman of the Reception Committee, graphically described how in Bengal, "even the cry of *Vande Mataram* was forbidden under severe penalties"† *Vande Mataram* had since then ceased to be a parochial cry and became a national one. "With time the Mother in *Vande Mataram* came to be identified with the whole of India"‡ *Vande Mataram* thus put its author, Bankim Chandra, on the national level and earned for him an immortal place in national history. Here is a remarkable instance of a song provincial in origin and written in a provincial language becoming a national cry and acting as a cementing force for a country of great diversity.

Since then in session after session of the Congress, it was sung with all the solemnity of a sacred hymn addressed to the Motherland. Why Congress sessions alone? Almost all our national deliberations began

\* Lokmanya Tilak, Tahmankar

\*\* History of the Congress, Pattabhi Sitaramayya

† How India Wrought for Freedom, Annie Besant

‡ Freedom Movement in Bengal, Nirmal Sinha

invariably with the *Vande Mataram* song sung as a prelude. It was not imposed or inducted, it came to occupy the position it does with effortless spontaneity, as if it were, the country's almost instinctive response to the Motherland. The song contains such universal elements as lift it at once from the parochial to the national plane. Its rich Sanskrit vocabulary made its all-India acceptance easy. Besides, the sentiments it embodies were irresistible in their appeal. Gandhiji said "*Bande Mataram*, apart from its wonderful associations, expresses the one national wish—the rise of India to her full height"\* For a nation struggling to free itself from foreign domination, there could be no greater "wish" or aim. The song automatically became the country's unofficial national anthem even before independence had been achieved. Thousands of our freedom fighters, men, women, youth and boys in their teens, faced ruthless oppression—lathis, bayonets and even bullets—with the heart-warming cry of *Vande Mataram* on their lips. *Vande Mataram* became an inseparable part of our freedom struggle.

Initially a controversy was raised about the interpretation of *Vande Mataram* by interested foreigners. But more controversies were awaiting it, though in different contexts. Since the Bengal partition days, the popularity of *Vande Mataram* had gone on increasing tremendously, as the national struggle became more and more acute, in every phase of that great struggle, *Vande Mataram* was an unfailing source of inspiration. During that period, nobody raised any question about *Vande Mataram*—certainly not the Muslims. In fact the Swadeshi movement saw both the Hindus and the patriotic Muslims shouting *Vande Mataram* side by side and facing cruel repression. But during the heyday of Muslim League politics in the 1930's, a section of the Muslims raised objection that *Vande Mataram* was an idolatrous song and thus contrary to the tenets of Islam. *Vande Mataram* and its author were severely condemned, a demand was made for banning *Anandamath* and *Rajsinha* and Bankim was roundly censured as anti-Muslim. Whether Bankim was really anti-Muslim will be examined in the following chapter. But so far as *Vande Mataram* is concerned, its supposedly idolatrous character was strongly disputed in discerning quarters. Replying to the objection Dr Rajendra Prasad said that "it did not urge idol worship" and that "Durga did not mean any

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\* *Three National Cries*, *Young India*, September 8, 1920

idol but was another name for the mother country ”\* Jawaharlal Nehru said . “I think that the whole song and all the words in it are thoroughly harmless and nobody can take exception to their meaning.”\*\* The editor of the *Modern Review*, himself a noted Brahmo and no admirer of idolatry† admirably argued out the case for *Vande Mataram*, saying that it contains no animus against Islam and that the 70 million throats referred to in the song comprise, in fact, the total population of the Hindus and the Muslims of the then Bengal, including Bihar and Orissa Torn from the context of *Anandamath* to which it was later added, *Vande Mataram* is quite harmless But even if it is viewed in the context of the *Anandamath* story, there should be no objection to it either, on religious or communal grounds The fight in the story is really against the English and only apparently against the Muslim rulers Besides, towards the end of the book, the Physician actually denounces idolatry instead of defending it The worship of 330 million deities is not the eternal religion, he tells Satyananda

Happily, all Muslims did not subscribe to the view that *Vande Mataram* was idolatrous and thus objectionable from the point of view of Islam Mr Rezaul Karim, a veteran writer and Congress leader of Bengal, strongly refuted the allegation that Bankim was a Muslim-hater and that *Vande Mataram* itself was idolatrous ‡ In his opinion *Vande Mataram* does not represent what is known in Arabic as *Ebadat* or the worship of God but is the worship of the Motherland Islam, in his view, does not bar conceiving the Motherland as Mother which has been done by several Arabic and Persian poets Again Maulana Syed Fazlur Rahman told the Bihar Muslims that the song “does not smack of *But-Prusti* (idol worship)” but is “an expression of the love of *Watan* (Motherland)” † †

A heated controversy thus went on for some time Lastly, in October 1937, the Congress Working Committee took official notice of the matter and, apparently with a view to setting the controversy at rest, recommended the singing of the first two stanzas only of the *Vande Mataram* song In thus detaching the first two stanzas from the rest of the song, the Working Committee sought to make it free from even the remotest suggestion

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\* *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, September 27, 1937

\*\* *Modern Review*, October, 1937

† *Modern Review*, Notes, November, 1937

‡ *Bankim Chandra O Mussalman Samaj*

†† *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, October 9, 1937

of idolatry anybody might read into it. Interestingly, Poet Tagore in his letter to Mr Nehru dated October 26, 1937, recommended the singing of the first two stanzas of the song.\* In its resolution the Working Committee narrated in brief how *Vande Mataram* had become closely linked with our freedom struggle. Since the days of the Banisal Conference of 1906, when blood was for the first time shed for the Motherland amidst the chanting of *Vande Mataram*, the Working Committee noted, "innumerable instances of sacrifice and suffering all over the country have been associated with *Vande Mataram* and men and women have not hesitated to face death even with that cry on their lips." The song and the words had become, the Committee said, "a living and inseparable part of our national movement".\*\* Explaining the significance of the Committee's decision Jawaharlal Nehru said "The *Vande Mataram* song, officially speaking, has now become a far greater part of our national movement than it was at any time before."† A song which had become the country's unofficial national anthem almost by an automatic process thus got official recognition from the Congress. However, there was discontent in several quarters at the detachment of the first two stanzas of the song from the rest of it and for a time the feeling prevailed that it was a truncated *Vande Mataram*. But the Working Committee might perhaps have felt that that was the only way of meeting the objection raised against it. In selecting the first two stanzas, which describe purely the beauty of the Motherland, the Committee's aim was that the song should not offend the susceptibility of any group or community.

Once again controversy centred round *Vande Mataram* when after independence India's national anthem was to be officially decided upon and the Constituent Assembly was seized of the problem. By that time another very remarkable song had come up—Rabindranath Tagore's *Janaganamana*, first sung at the Calcutta Congress of 1911, preceded of course by the singing of *Vande Mataram*. Again *Janaganamana* was also sung at the 1917 Congress session at Calcutta which was inaugurated by the singing of *Vande Mataram*. From that time onwards the Tagore song started becoming very popular, and many discerning persons felt that it deserved recognition as the national anthem of India. There was some

\* *Rabindra Jyoti*, P. K. Mukherji

\*\* *Modern Review*, November, 1937

† *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, October 27, 1937

misunderstanding about *Janaganamana*, namely, that it was composed in honour of King George V, which however was completely removed. The Azad Hind Fauj of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose took up the Tagore song as the national anthem, and this considerably strengthened its claim for recognition as such by the Government after independence. But there was also a very strong section of opinion favouring the Bankim song as the national anthem, specially because of its long association with the passion and poignancy of the national struggle. For instance the Provincial Congress Committees with a few exceptions favoured *Vande Mataram*.\*

Soon after independence the Government provisionally declared *Janaganamana* the national anthem in response to the demand from the country's UN delegation. Nehru said in August 1948 "It is unfortunate that some kind of argument has arisen between *Vande Mataram* and *Janaganamana*. *Vande Mataram* is obviously and indisputably the premier national song of India with a great historical tradition, it was intimately connected with our struggle for freedom. That position it is bound to retain and no other song can displace it"\*\*. Thus there was no question about the primacy of *Vande Mataram*, but *Janaganamana* was found to have been more suitable for orchestration and hence preferred in many quarters.

The Steering Committee of the Constituent Assembly decided in January 1950 on *Janaganamana* as national anthem but gave "the same honoured place" to *Vande Mataram* in view of the strong sentiment in favour of the latter. The Congress Consenbly party amended the Committee's decision by adding "the same status" to the words "the same honoured place". Instead of a resolution being passed by the Constituent Assembly, President Dr Rajendra Prasad himself made an announcement about the national anthem saying "The composition consisting of the words and music known as *Janaganamana* is the national anthem of India subject to such alterations in words as the Government may authorise as occasion arises, and the song *Vande Mataram* which has played a historic part in the struggle for Indian freedom shall be honoured equally with *Janaganamana* and shall have equal status with it. I hope this will satisfy the members"†.

\* *Modern Review*, February, 1950

\*\* *Our National Songs*, Publications Division

† *Constituent Assembly Proceedings*, January 24, 1950

## Ethical Accent

TWO OTHER novels of this period, both with a purpose, were *Devī Chaudhurani* and *Sitaram*. The former was written at about the time when Bankim was engaged in the Hastie controversy and thus delving deep into Hindu religion and philosophy. Both the novels bear the stamp of the author's philosophic mood, while not being without his burning passion for a just social order in which the good are protected and the wicked, punished.

The story of *Devī Chaudhurani* is briefly this. Prafulla, the daughter of a poor widow, is chosen by a rich zamindar named Haraballabh as bride for his only son, Brajeshwar, on account of her exquisite beauty. The marriage passes off smoothly. But subsequently Haraballabh comes to know of a social stigma falsely attached to Prafulla's mother by mischievous people and refuses to accept Prafulla as his daughter-in-law, thereby leaving the mother and the daughter to live virtually as paupers. Too much of his father's son, Brajeshwar does not take Prafulla back, even though he has come to love her most among all his three wives.

After her mother's death, the helpless Prafulla is abducted by an evil person but manages to escape into a dense and desolate forest where she meets an old man lying on his death-bed in a big dilapidated building supposed to have been the palace of one of the last Hindu kings. There she inherits an enormous buried treasure from the old man who discovered it underground. Almost immediately thereafter the old man dies leaving her the sole owner of that big treasure.

Then there is an astonishing turn in the deserted woman's life. She comes in an unexpected contact with Bhawani Pathak, a well-known dacoit, who rules over the vast forest tract with his many thousand armed followers. Pathak is no ordinary dacoit but of the Robin Hood type.



At that dreadful juncture of the decay of the Muslim regime and the barest beginning of the British rule, the whole province of Bengal is in the grip of utter lawlessness and anarchy, with the powerful tyrannising over the weak and the poor and thus putting them to infinite torture and misery. Pathak has thus taken upon himself the task of protecting the weak and punishing the wicked. He commits dacoity, not for his own enjoyment, but to help the poor and the down-trodden.

Impressed by his powerful personality and the noble mission of his life, Prafulla agrees to undergo a five-year period of training to fit herself out for her life's task. Pathak not only imparts to her education and knowledge in a general way but also subjects her to a rigorous process of discipline, physical and mental, including the practice of *yoga* and the conquest of sex desire. Specifically he teaches her the essence of the *Gita* and *Nishkam Dharma*. At the end of the training period Pathak asks "Tell me, what course of life would you choose to follow now?" "Work and work alone I shall do. Surely the path of knowledge is not meant for an unaccomplished soul like mine"—thus replies Prafulla. Bhawanī Pathak says "Good, I am glad to hear this, but work you shall have to do without being attached to it." Pathak goes on "There is no king in this country at present. The Muslim power is extinct now and the British are just come. They do not know how to rule, nor do they care to rule. I myself punish the wicked and protect the gentle."\*

In Prafulla, Pathak finds what he has been looking for — a highly intelligent, accomplished and beautiful lady whom he can set up as queen and in whose name he can carry out his self-ordained task. So Prafulla becomes *Devī Rani* or *Devī Chaudhurani*.

But five years of rigid self-discipline has made her non-attached to life. Though associated with a dacoit gang, she never commits dacoity herself but on the contrary distributes her wealth among the poor, fully convinced that service to humanity is the best way of worshipping God. *Devī* moves from place to place by riverways on her boat fully equipped with men and arms, while Pathak's followers are always there to help her in times of need. Though not a dacoit herself, she is widely known as one whom the English are anxious to capture.

Five years roll by. Once, information reaches *Devī* that her father-in-

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\* *Devī Chaudhurani*, English translation by S. C. Mitra.

law is in great financial trouble. An opportunity to help him comes when Devi's men attack Brajeshwar's boat and bring him over to Delhi. She offers him a loan of Rs 50,000. Pleasantly surprised to meet Devi, Brajeshwar accepts the money promising to return it on a fixed date. The meeting with her husband brings about a complete change in her mind, she asks Bhawani Pathak to relieve her of her queenhood and let her live down the name of a female dacoit. But relief does not come so soon as that.

Meanwhile, Brajeshwar has failed to induce his mean and wicked father to repay the loan and has personally come to Devi's boat to secure an extension of time. There he learns to his great surprise that his ungrateful father has given information about Devi's movements to the English who have sent Lt Brennan, along with 500 sepoys, accompanied by his father himself to capture Devi. He also finds that knowing all this Devi has dispensed with her men and arms and decided to surrender to the British after having met her husband. But the magic of Brajeshwar's love and his fervent appeal to her to return to his village home as his most beloved wife makes her change her mind. Taking advantage of a severe storm which has started blowing, Devi manages to get her boat out of the clutches of the sepoys with both Haraballabh and the English commander as her captives. She, however, lets them off and herself returns with her husband to his village home. Devi Chaudhurani dies. Prafulla is reborn.

As a wife Prafulla gives evidence of her training and self-cultivation by serving everybody and making the household an abode of peace and happiness. From Pathak she has learnt the lesson of subjecting desire to other people's good. "Prafulla's culture was wholly non-egoistic. Although she belonged to the world, she was quite out of it, in a sense, as she was free from all earthly desires. She had practised to live a desire-free life and at the same time pursued the path of work for her cultural goal. Desire implies selfish enjoyment—work means search for others' happiness."\*

Devi Chaudhurani and Bhawani Pathak were historical figures mentioned in several old records. Hunter's *Statistical Accounts of Bengal* says that Lt Brennan fought and killed Pathak in 1787 and that a female

\* *Devi Chaudhurani*, English translation by S. C. Mitra.

dacoit named Devi Chaudhurani was in league with him. Collector Glazier's report on the Rungpur district (now in Bangladesh), which is the *mise en scene* of *Devi Chaudhurani*, shows that dacoity was the order of the day. According to historian Jadunath Sarkar, Pathak belonged to the Arrah district of Bihar and died in a fight with the British in 1787.\* Once again in *Devi Chaudhurani* Bankim has plainly no pretension to writing an historical novel, except for the fact that he has depicted the then existing social conditions as they were. But so far as the characters are concerned, he has taken their barest skeleton from history to give them new flesh and blood, transforming them into a batch of dedicated deliverers of the oppressed humanity. Indeed he has made out of the scanty materials available a story exactly to suit his ideological needs. Bhawani is no ordinary dacoit, nor is Devi the female desperado of that glimmering period spoken of in historical records. She is a queen presiding over a mission of mercy.

*Sitaram* takes us back to the old history of the districts of Jessore and Khulna (now in Bangladesh). Sitaram Rai was a rich and powerful zamindar of Bhushna who built a new capital named Mohammedpur and lived there in magnificence. In his report on the Jessore district, Westland says that asked by the Emperor in Delhi to collect revenues on his behalf from the Rajas of 12 provinces, Sitaram occupied the territories and declared himself the lord thereof, refusing to pay revenue to the Nawab, though not to the Emperor. The Nawab levied war against him. But fighting from his fortified city, Sitaram defeated the Nawab's forces. Ultimately, however, he was either captured or he surrendered to the Nawab. According to one story, he died by taking poison, according to another, he was impaled alive. All this happened in about the early years of the 18th century.

Here again the available historical materials are far from adequate. But Bankim is not aiming at producing an historical novel, although the historical background has been correctly reflected. Out of the materials available, however, he builds up a story of a hero who has a burning passion for establishing a just order based on religion and ethics and stands out bravely against the oppression and tyranny of a decadent regime. But the main point of interest lies not so much in this as in the gradual

\* *Bankim's Works*, Centenary Edition, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad

decay of a potentially great character through the lack of self-restraint. The interest is not historical but human and ethical.

The story of *Sitaram* is briefly this. Sitaram comes in conflict with a Mohammedan Kazi in trying to save his brother-in-law, Gangaram, from being buried alive, and having escaped elsewhere, establishes a new city named Mohammedpur where he sets up a kingdom, and a Hindu kingdom at that. He fortifies the city very well and adorns it with many fine buildings. But however powerful Sitaram may be, he has a hidden tragedy in his life. He has never been united with Shri, his first wife, because of an astrological forecast that she will be instrumental in the death of one very dear to her, meaning her husband. In connection with the Gangaram incident, Sitaram comes in contact with Shri after a long time and becomes enamoured of her. But out of consideration for Sitaram's safety, she would not surrender and manages to escape to become a nun. Once again when Sitaram's city is in danger and Sitaram himself is absent, Shri appears on the scene with a sister nun, Jayanti, and helps save the situation. The hero, however, appears at the last moment to defend his city. Since then Sitaram starts doting on Shri despite his having two other wives. A separate house, *Chittavishram*, is provided for Shri where Sitaram stays day and night infatuated by her beauty and charm and completely neglecting the state duties. Gradually decadence sets in. The treasury is depleted. The army gets demoralised not receiving their salary. The officials neglect their work taking advantage of the ruler's absence and inattention. A flourishing kingdom decays. Coming to learn of the situation, Shri one day manages to flee away so that Sitaram's infatuation may be shaken off. But this produces the opposite effect. Sitaram becomes furious with everybody and lets loose a reign of terror on his subjects. Over and above, he gets hold of other women from the city, in the absence of Shri, and starts doting on them, to the complete detriment of the state affairs. At last the inevitable assault from the Nawab comes, and unprepared and with his army almost completely depleted, Sitaram fails to save his city. He manages to escape but the city falls. Thus the purposeful story of the rise and fall of an otherwise powerful personality ends. *Sitaram* provides a striking contrast to *Devī Chaudhuranī*. In the latter rigid self-discipline creates a highly balanced personality, in the former precisely the lack of this quality leads to a tragic decline.

*Anandamath*, *Devī Chaudhurani* and *Sitaram*, collectively called the Triad, were written with a purpose. In all the three Bankim chooses a dim period of history so that his imagination can have the fullest play. In a social context that is historically correct, he picks up characters whom he can fashion according to his necessity and give a new dimension too.

What indeed is the message he wants to preach through these books? In the first place all the three novels represent a spirit of revolt against a rotten socio-political order which fails to protect the weak against the tyranny of the strong and thus to ensure justice to all. This spirit speaks of Bankim's utter disgust for anarchy, social disequilibrium and social injustice. The novels represent his idealistic urge for service to the country and on a wider canvas to humanity and also his passion for a social order based on uprightness, ethics and impartiality. In *Anandamath*, he preaches the gospel of patriotism in a manner that electrifies his countrymen. In *Devī Chaudhurani*, service to humanity is once again put in altogether an exciting context of benevolent brigandage. In *Sitaram*, hankering for a just order which alone can ensure social good takes the form of a noble urge, though thwarted in the end by reckless individual dissipation.

On a higher dimension Bankim preaches a message which is at once philosophical and ethical. *Anandamath* ends on the note—bad means cannot justify good ends. In the midst of his resounding success Satyananda is called away to the meditative silence of the Himalayas, because the means he has adopted, that is, robbery and dacoity, is not pure enough for his high patriotic impulse. Years later the people were taught by Gandhiji that the means must match the ends in purity. Whenever Gandhiji found that sin or violence had entered the mass agitation coming up under his leadership, he did not hesitate to call it off even in the midst of its impressive success and thus retire into the silence of his soul. Indeed it will not be an exaggeration to say that it was Bankim who for the first time introduced an ethical element into political and social service. Bankim infused into modern patriotism the ancient spirit of Indian ethics.

*Devī Chaudhurani* is as it were an illustration of Bankim's theory of self-culture as enunciated in several of his works, notably *Dharmatattva*. This theory, as we shall see later, enjoins upon men a harmonious development of all human faculties. The substance of religion is culture—this is one of the mottoes Bankim has taken up for this novel. Besides, service to

humanity receives in it a high ethical orientation, divinity being manifest in the humanity itself. Here also, as in *Anandamath*, the question of means and ends comes up, for in the story's striking finale, Bhawani Pathak ultimately comes to realise the wrong he has done in committing dacoities, even though for a good cause, and atones for the same by delivering himself up to the British. In *Sitaram*, high ethical values are placed in the forefront as the corner-stone of a balanced personality as well as of a just socio-political order. Sitaram has many high qualities of a hero. But his is not a balanced personality—he lacks in the basic quality of self-restraint. That fatal deficiency brings about his ruin and also of the just kingdom he has built up by virtue of his own magnificent heroism.

These three novels are controversial. According to some critics they represent Bankim at his best containing as they do the cream of his nation-building message and philosophical thought. Their greatest admirer is perhaps Sri Aurobindo who says: "It is possible that the literary critic of the future will reckon *Kapalkundala*, *Bishabriksha* and *Krishnakanter Will* as his artistic masterpieces and speak with qualified praise about his *Devī Chaudhurani*, *Anandamath*, *Krishnacharitra* and *Dharmatattwa*. Yet it is the Bankim of these latter works and not the Bankim of the great creative masterpieces who will rank among the makers of modern India. The earlier Bankim was a poet and stylist—the later Bankim was a seer and nation-builder."\*

There are other critics, however, who do not rate these three novels high from the artistic point of view. Tagore, otherwise a great admirer of Bankim, did not recognise much of an artistic value in *Anandamath*. But plainly speaking, art or realism is not Bankim's aim in these novels. All artistic necessities are subjected in these to a masterly didacticism and to the supreme purpose of conveying a lofty message. For instance, Devī is suddenly transformed from a dacoit queen into a plain housewife doing domestic chores for her husband and the other family members. This may hardly be permissible from the point of view of realism or art. But for Bankim this turn of the story is a necessity. He wants to show that with her highly balanced personality attained through five years of rigid self-cultivation, Devī could adjust herself to any circumstances and serve the family as a unit of the larger society. Similarly Sitaram's degradation

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\* *Bankim-Tilak-Dayananda*

is shown as an absolutely unmitigated process only to bring out the ruinous effect of the lack of self-culture in man. Accidental situations are not too few, and at times even the necessary verisimilitude is sacrificed. Characters are cast in certain set moulds with preconceived objectives. Bankim deliberately allows art to suffer because he wants his message to shine, and it is the message which makes these books a class by themselves.

Was Bankim anti-Muslim? This question becomes important in connection with these three novels and also *Rajsinha*. The question came up in a vehement form in the thirties when Bankim was roundly condemned as a Muslim-hater by a section of the Muslims. The question was closely scrutinised by knowledgeable quarters who found that Bankim was really not anti-Muslim and that the cry against him was mostly politically motivated.

Admittedly, Bankim was deeply attached to the Hindu religion in its purest form. But his attachment to his own religion did not mean his antagonism to others. Nowhere in the entire body of his works does one come across religious bigotry in any form. On the contrary, as we shall see in a later chapter, he gave the most liberal interpretation to the Hindu thought so as to make it universally acceptable. Similarly, nowhere does he make even the slightest disparagement of Islam as a religion or the Muslims as a people. "Nobody to this day has been able to show," says Jadunath Sarkar, "that in his writings Bankim Chandra has tried to prove the truths and tenets of Islam as false or abused the founder of Islam."\* In *Anandamath*, *Devī Chaudhurani*, and *Sitaram*, he has chosen a period of Muslim decadence as background which is historically unquestionable, and he has chosen it, not because he has an animus against the Muslims, but because it suits his artistic or ideological necessity most. Against that background, as Mr. Rezaul Karim says, he has painted some living characters. The question of love or hatred does not, therefore, arise at all.\*\* The wrath of the author, if one can at all deduce it from the novels, is rather against the British. In *Anandamath* the fight is mainly against the Company's sepoys, in *Devī Chaudhurani*, too, it is the English who try to capture Devī and Pathak. The Muslim rulers are

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\* Bankim Centenary Supplement, *Hindusthan Standard*, June 26, 1938

\*\* *Bankim Chandra O Mussalman Samaj*

in the background. If the decadent Muslim regime is condemned, it is not because it is Muslim but because it is decadent.

This will be evident from his treatment of the character of Sitaram who has a Muslim *Fakir* named Chand Shah as his adviser and names his capital city Mohammedpur at the latter's instance. He has a high regard for the *Fakir* who makes no discrimination between the Hindu and the Muslim. Similarly, Sitaram himself does not discriminate against the Muslims and treats all his subjects, Hindus and Muslims, alike. At the same time, Bankim paints in a glaring light Sitaram's own fall from the ideals of Hinduism and the reign of terror he lets loose upon the kingdom in his frustration over not getting Shri. Particularly noticeable is his most un-Hindu order to whip Jayanti, Shri's sister nun, naked in public view. The depravity and degradation of a hero cannot be displayed in a more lurid light. Bankim has not spared Sitaram whom he wants otherwise to paint as the last heroic Hindu ruler resisting Muslim domination. In that state of decline of Sitaram's kingdom, the *Fakir* leaves for Mecca in sheer disgust uttering the bitter lament: "I have decided not to reside in a place where there are Hindus." This is the lesson Sitaram has taught me. Can there be a more bitter indictment of a degenerate Hindu king? Had Bankim been anti-Muslim he would not have put this trenchant condemnation of a Hindu king on the lips of a Muslim *Fakir*. Bankim is thus equally harsh on regimes which are devoid of human values, no matter whether they are Hindu or Muslim.

*Rajsinha* is another fiction to which an anti-Muslim stigma has been wrongly attached. Historically, it is the story of a war between the Mughal emperor and a Rajput king. But there is no question in it of race or religion or any antipathy towards the Muslims. It is simply the heroic effort of the ruler of a small kingdom to maintain his independence against the onslaughts of the mighty Mughal emperor. Basically it is a universal story of a patriotic fight against imperialist aggression. The impression it creates is one of fervent patriotism free from any suggestion of race or religion. *Rajsinha* remains eternally a symbol of a brave resistance against the militant imperialism of a mighty power.

As if to avoid any misunderstanding on this point, Bankim himself says at the end of the book: "One is not good simply because he is a Hindu, nor bad because he is a Mohammedan. Nor can it be true to say that all Hindus are bad and all Mohammedans are good. There are



good and bad men equally in both the communities. It has rather to be admitted that since the Mussalman was the ruler in India for so many centuries, he surely excelled his contemporary Hindus in the qualities of the ruler. But it is also not true that all Muslim rulers were superior to the Hindu rulers. In some cases the Mohammedan ruler had better qualities and in some cases the Hindu ruler was better."

Bankim's extensive portrait gallery reveals good and bad men and women in both the communities. From the artistic point of view it is interesting to see that some of the finest characters drawn by Bankim are Muslims. Ayesha is excellent in her beauty, love and single-minded devotion to Jagat Singh, a Hindu. She is one of Bankim's most charming feminine portraits. Osman and Mubarak are both heroic figures and possess high chivalrous qualities. Even the minor character of Mohammad Ali in *Mrinalini* shines beautifully in his noble gestures, while Pashupati, a Hindu Minister, is painted as a despicable traitor.

It has been suggested in some quarters that Bankim lost sight of the multiple character of the Indian society. But this does not seem to be correct. With all his attachment to Hindu values, Bankim never lost sight of the composite nature of the population of India. Several of his writings bear this out, for instance, his conception of the Indian peasantry comprises both Hashim Sheikh and Rama Kaibarta, typical Muslim and Hindu peasants. The profuse sympathy he pours upon the Indian peasantry covers both the communities. His essays on history show that he was fully conscious of the historical process which brought the Muslims to this country and eventually made them a part of it (*Bharat Kalanka*).

Bankim was a believer in basic values, not in denominational differences. These values he termed *Dharma*. It is a different matter if he thought that Hinduism contained the elements of *Dharma* most. But the important point is *Dharma*, that is, the basic qualities of character which a man must possess, to whichever religion he may belong. Nothing can bring out his liberal mind more than the following remark from the epilogue to *Rajsinha*. "A man, whether he is a Hindu or a Muslim, who has *Dharma* along with other qualities, is superior. A man who with all his qualities is lacking in *Dharma* is inferior, no matter whether he is a Hindu or a Muslim."

## Views on Socio-Polity

**N**ORMALLY A government servant is not uninhibited in the expression of his political opinion. Yet Bankim did not altogether refrain from communicating such ideas. At times he did not shrink even from open criticism of the Government. Besides, the large body of his non-fiction work as also his satirical writings leave no doubt about the kind of politics and society he wanted for his country. These ideas constitute the cream of his constructive thinking.

The days of Bankim's rise to eminence were also the seed time of Indian nationalism. In 1876, the Indian Association which spearheaded many an agitation against unjust measures came into existence under the leadership of Surendra Nath Banerjee and Ananda Mohan Bose. On the civil service issue, the Association decided to appeal to the whole of India. In this context the all-India tour undertaken by Surendra Nath Banerjee helped step up the growing sense of national unity. The Delhi Durbar of 1877 brought the representatives of the whole of India together. The agitation against the Arms Act and the Vernacular Press Act of 1878, the Ilbert Bill agitation of 1883, the first National Conference held the same year and the birth of the Indian National Congress in 1885 were some of the political landmarks of those formative days of Indian nationalism. Where did Bankim stand in relation to the country's political scene?

With the liberty government officials enjoyed before and immediately after the uprising of 1857, Bankim joined the British Indian Association while being posted in Khulna in 1863\*.

When the Indian Association came into existence, Bankim wrote a sympathetic letter about it and helped it raise a fund for sending a dele-

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\* *Bankim's Works*, Part II, Sahitya Sansad, Introduction by J. C. Bagal

gation to England in 1879. These were unmistakable indications of his sympathy for political organisation for public good. But later on he seems to have felt somewhat disillusioned. Or his ideas might have changed to an extent. After his retirement he could as well have joined the Indian National Congress but did not do so, while not being unsympathetic towards the aims and objectives of that organisation. Bijoy Lal Datta quotes him as saying "I can by no means say that I have no sympathy for the Congress—that it has a noble objective is beyond question. But its method of working is such that it has not become fit for mass participation. All its agitations seem to have an ephemeral look and lack in inner strength."\* He told Datta further that though free from the shackles of government service, he did not propose to join the Congress for the time being. One wonders if he really wanted to join it at a later stage. Apparently he had no lack of sympathy for the "noble objective" of the Congress. But what he did not relish was its method of working which kept it confined among a handful of the elite to the exclusion of the masses.

Before his socio-political ideas are examined in detail, it is necessary to place him in the all-India context. There is an impression current in certain quarters that Bankim was thinking in terms of Bengal only and not of India. This idea does not seem to be wholly correct. True, in many of his writings he spoke only of Bengal, true also that he passionately sought for the revival of Bengal's literature, history and culture. Yet it is wrong to suggest that his outlook was provincial or that the growing sense of Indian nationalism had left him untouched. Though specifically relevant at times, his writings indicate his keen all-India awareness and have a country-wide appeal and applicability. Consciousness of India as a whole burns bright in many of his works. The essay *Bharat Kalanka* (*Vividha Prabandha I*) may be said to represent the gist of his thinking on the matter. Herein he attributes the country's downfall to the absence of the ideas of nationalism and political independence in ancient India. He regrets the lack of the spirit of nation-building among the Indians. This India, he notes, is the home of many peoples different racially, linguistically and in point of religion. But his regret is that there is no unity among them. Nationality and nation-building, he thinks, have

\* *Bharati*, Asadh, 1301 (B S)

been imported into this country by the English, and they are precious gifts indeed to be taken up by the Indian people

In another essay, *Bangadarshaner Patra Suchana*, he stresses the urgency of uniting mind and effort among the great variety of races and language groups constituting India. He is clearly thinking of inter-provincial unity in terms of nation-building. There are ideas, he thinks, which must travel beyond the borders of Bengal and reach the whole of India. For the time being English has to be the vehicle of such ideas in the absence of a link language like Sanskrit. He, therefore, envisages the role of English as a factor for forging all-India unity. In a letter written to Dr S. C. Mukherji in 1872 he says "There is no hope for India until the Bengali and the Punjabi understand and influence each other and can bring their joint influence to bear upon the Englishman."\* This again is an instance of his idea of how effective the impact of inter-provincial unity could be on our alien rulers.

Historical studies being the most effective means of stirring up national consciousness, Bankim regrets the lack of a correct history of India, that is, Indian history from the Indian point of view, as much as he regrets the lack of a true history of Bengal (*Banglar Itihas*). In making a detailed comparison between the state of things in ancient and modern India, he thinks that the latter offers more advantages on balance (*Bharatvarsher Swadhinata Ebang Paradhinata*) and shows his complete awareness of the British policies and their impact on India as a whole (*Prachin Bharatvarsher Rajniti*). In *Dharmatattwa* (Chapter 24) the preceptor warns that India must not imitate the aggressive patriotism of the West but balance patriotism with universalism. He says "If that happens, the India of the future will be able to occupy the foremost place in the comity of nations." These and other illustrations of their kind show that Bankim unmistakably shared in the newly awakened fervour for Indian unity and nationhood. The thrilling impulse seems to have moved him to the core of his being. He hated living like a temporary inmate in one's own country enjoying the beneficence of a foreign master. He was yearning for national unity and national resurgence so that the whole of India might come together. On a limited scale and as part of the larger national perspective, he was

\* *Bankim's Works*, Centenary Edition, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad

also thinking of Bengal's revival Within the bounds of Bengal he also advocated the cause of the mother tongue for mass education

Bankim's political thought reflects three distinct traits—liberalism, radicalism and ethical orientation Perhaps he was trying to synthesise all the three in his philosophy of life, but at times one trait became more pronounced than the others In so far as he welcomed a spell of British rule as beneficial to India, he put up a liberal image of himself He reflected the liberal thinking of his age also in his admiration for Western education and science and for the English language But gradually his thinking put on a more and more radical edge making him, in a way, that is, in his intellectual conviction at least, a precursor of the kind of militancy which swept Indian politics towards the end of the century His contempt for the politics of begging and petition, mercilessly caricatured in many of his writings, his utter dislike of slavish Western imitation, his emphasis on mass education and mass appeal, his passionate love for his own language and literature, his warm advocacy of Indian culture and of Indianness in things, were symptomatic of a radical outlook on the socio-polity Gradually religious ethics came to occupy a pivotal point in his philosophical system, thereby not weakening but strengthening and making more dignified his socio-political thought pattern

So far as politics is concerned he seems to have been impatient of the kind of agitation carried on those days through the Press and on the platform Not being mass-based, it had, in his estimation, a kind of unreality about it These agitations were confined to the English-knowing elite, while the masses of the people, illiterate and ignorant of the English language, were untouched by the same The city-bred and city-based agitations raised no echo in the life of the vast multitudes living in the benighted rural areas Bankim, it seems, did not like the incessant political talk, the petitions and prayers, without any constructive action He has some harsh words to say on the politics of nagging and begging and passing effete resolutions in associations and chambers, having no touch with the masses of the people A wise bee hums out some home truths to Kamalakanta The bee hums, collects honey and even stings, when necessary But people in this country only nag and cry and indulge in useless talk, they do not do any real work, far less sting (*Kamalakanter Patra No 3*) Bankim again satirically says that politics divorced from reality is fit for title-holders, sycophants, frauds, beggars and editors (*Kamalakanter*

*Patra No 2*). In another satirical piece, he caricatures the kind of Press criticism current those days, a very inane and pointless criticism of an equally pointless, mechanical administrative year (*Varsha Samalochon, Lok Rahasya*). It was his own high idealism which made Bankim so impatient of the current politics and Press comments. He even found the frequent Press criticism of the administration lacking in moral stamina. That is why for a time the impression gained ground that he was no friend of what is popularly known as the freedom of the Press.

But perhaps it would be unfair to say that Bankim was an enemy of Press freedom or was scornful of the Press. In his *Lok Shiksha* he frankly acknowledges the highly educative role of the mass circulation newspapers of the West but is sorry to miss it in his own country. Here not only is the number of newspapers severely limited but the Press itself offers too much of talk and too little of education. When again, in the same essay, he regrets that there are not many newspapers in the country's different languages and that the English newspaper Press could only have a limited appeal, he clearly envisages the necessity of developing the language Press in India through which alone can the masses be approached. As regards the quality of newspapers, he wants them to be really of educative worth to the people.

In spite of being a Government servant, or possibly because of his being so, Bankim was a bitter critic of the way administration was being carried on. His trenchant remarks on the same lie scattered in many of his writings. Perhaps there could not have been a more pungent satire on the British administration in Bengal than his *Bangla Shasaner Kal* embodying a vivid picture of the utterly wooden and mechanical rule then in vogue. But, of course, he pays a tribute to Lieutenant-Governor Sir George Campbell for trying to rise above it. His satirical sketch *Muchram Gurer Jwancharit* brings out the hollowness underlying the institution of Deputy Magistracy to which he himself belonged. About the administration of justice as it prevailed those days, he makes the following bold and biting remark: "The court and the brothel are the same, without money one could have admittance to neither" (*Bangadesher Krishak, II*). Here he is referring to the costly nature of justice those days and how the poor who could not afford the cost were naturally debarred from obtaining it. He never fails to pour out his deep sympathy for the poor peasants, the victims of the Permanent Settlement introduced

by Lord Cornwallis. The Permanent Settlement is a permanent blot on the name of the English, he says (*Bangadesher Krishak, IV*). The Settlement, he thinks, should have been made direct with the tillers of the soil, and not with the zamindars. This is not something one could expect from the pen of a loyalist or a liberal.

Bankim served periods of intellectual apprenticeship in the schools of Rousseau, Spencer, Bentham, Mill and Comte. His socio-political writings bear traces of their varying influence at different periods of his life. With the attainment of intellectual maturity he shed their influence in varying degrees. But Comte's influence on him was most enduring, presumably because he could more easily bring the positivist philosophy in line with his own politico-ethical convictions.

He seems to have been at one with Rousseau in his belief that the pre-social man lived in an idyllic state. But at the same time, he thinks that society had to be formed for the sake of coordinating human relations and for the practice of *Dharma*. However, the formation of society brings inevitably in its wake the concomitant evils of poverty and loss of liberty. Social formation invariably throws up evils like oppression by the king or the state or by the majority on the minority. These political consequences have to be faced, since everybody cannot claim to govern and there must be a governing authority like the king or any other ruling agency. A government is the creation of the society which is more general. Normally fascinated by the idea of the individual liberty, possibly on the pattern of Mill, Bankim, however, considers society essential to the practice of *Dharma*. To fight the evils flowing from social formation, doctrines of socialism and communism were in vogue in the West. But Bankim thinks that the best way of fighting social evils is to create an enlightened public opinion through the propagation of good ideas. In his essay called *Bahubal O Bakyabal* (Power of Arms and Power of Speech), wherein he deals with some of these problems, he shows how *Bakyabal* or the power of speech is far more effective in bringing about changes. Evidently Bankim is thinking of a democratic society wherein good words and good ideas are used to effect social transformation. Utilitarian ideas seem to have flowed in profusion into Bankim's youthful mind, like those of Auguste Comte, and even though he shed his initial utilitarian indoctrination to an extent later in life, he was never entirely free from it. This becomes evident when, in interpreting the

Message of Krishna, he gives it a utilitarian orientation, saying that that which sustains the living beings is *Dharma*. He even presumes that Spencer, Bentham and Mill would possibly not have objected to this definition of *Dharma*\*. Aware of the evils which emanate from social formation, Bankim nevertheless places utmost importance on society, because it is an organisation of human beings for regulating their inter-relations. In his *Dharmatattwa* (Chapter 24) he quotes Herbert Spencer as saying "The life of the social organism must, as an end, rank above the lives of its units." He is also aware of the importance attached to society and for that matter to humanity by Comte who said that the "true human point of view is not individual but social." In *Dharmatattwa*, Bankim expounds his theory thus. Since social organisation is necessary for coordinating human relations, the preservation of society is to be rated above everything else. Here he equates society with country whose defence, he thinks, is the highest human obligation next only to devotion to God. "The country's defence is a far greater *Dharma* than self-defence. That is why thousands of people have defended their country at the cost of their own selves," the preceptor says. Here Bankim is trying to synthesise the divine and the human, he is trying to integrate his spiritual urge with his patriotic passion, and the philosophies of Mill and Comte come handy to him. In the concluding chapter of *Dharmatattwa*, the preceptor, while wishing that his disciple had a firm faith in God, says - "Don't forget that the love of the country is the highest virtue." Patriotism is thus made an integral part of his religio-ethical system.

Because Bankim attached so much importance to social organisation, he concomitantly advocated mass education as the most effective means of socio-political uplift. He deeply deplored the lack of sympathy between the English educated elite and the people at large. In his *A Popular Literature for Bengal* he says "And we Bengalis are strangely apt to forget that it is only through Bengali that the people can be moved. We preach in English, harangue in English, write in English, perfectly forgetful that the great masses, whom it is absolutely necessary to move to carry out any great project of social reform, remain stone-deaf to all our eloquence." The most regrettable feature of the situation, according to

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\* *Krishnacharitra*, Part IV, Chapter 7



Bankim, was the complete lack of sympathy between the educated and the uneducated, resulting in a big gap between those receiving education and those deprived of the light thereof. This cruel barrier had to be removed if the nation had to progress and prosper. Education of the masses, therefore, was an imperative necessity. On the question of educational policy, one school of opinion held that mass education was not necessary, since knowledge and enlightenment would filter down to the lowest strata through a handful of educated people at the top. Bankim was thoroughly opposed to this filtration theory, which in effect meant the monopolisation of education by the rich and the privileged. He says that a peasant's son has as much right to education as a rich man's son and that it is a wrong official policy to spend more from the state exchequer on the education of the affluent class than on the education of the poor. That is why he upholds Lieutenant-Governor Sir George Campbell's policy of giving financial support to common man's education as against his predecessor Sir William Grey's policy of patronising higher education at the cost of mass enlightenment.\* But by education Bankim does not mean merely the three R's, for him the substance of education is culture. He explains how many of the illiterate grandmothers of old were superior culturally to the so-called English educated people of his time. Education must foster the harmonious development of a man's different faculties and help unfold the qualities of his character. Popular commentary on epics and other holy texts which was a common feature of life in the olden days was indeed an effective means of imparting education in the real sense of the term. But Western education was failing to develop those cultural values.\*\*

On social problems Bankim reveals himself as a thinker of cautious progressivism. The age he lived in was one of great social movements and consequently of great controversies. He shared the stirring impulse no doubt, but his enthusiasm was tempered with certain other considerations, namely, practical. He refers to three determining factors. The first is *Dharma* or what he calls the eternal religion of the Hindus, which is very liberal and sanctions whatever is good for man. Secondly, there are religious scriptures or what he calls the *Dharmashastra*, which enjoin a

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\* *Sir William Grey* & *Sir George Campbell*, *Bankim's Works*, Sahitya Sansad

\*\* *Lok Shiksha*

code of Do's and Don'ts in social matters and lay down various injunctions which are sometimes a negation of the spirit of *Dharma*. Lastly there is *Lokachar* or a body of social customs which is not always sanctioned even by the *Dharmashastra* but is an accretion of centuries. To Bankim, *Dharma* whose function is to protect human beings is supreme. Whatever is contrary to it is not acceptable to him, not even *Dharmashastra*. Unfortunately, in social matters he finds that *Lokachar* has a more powerful hold on the people than the true spirit of *Dharma* or even *Dharmashastra*. That, in his opinion, is the real impediment to all social progress in the country. In such circumstances quoting scriptures in support of social progress is ineffective, since people would in no case go against *Lokachar*, however irrational and disabling it may be. So also is progressive social legislation of no help, because the people would not accept it in view of their strong and traditional attachment to *Lokachar*. Bankim's recipe is mass education and enlightenment so as to free the people's mind from the crippling effects of social customs and superstitions.

At one stage a controversy arose as to whether it was permissible for the Hindus to undertake sea voyage which was till then a taboo. In a letter written to Benoy Krishna Deb, Bankim fully supports sea voyage being undertaken by the Hindus on the ground that it is good for the Indians and, therefore, not contrary to the true spirit of religion. This evidently shows Bankim's catholicity and courage\*.

In *Samya* Bankim comes out as a warm supporter of the cause of women. Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, the eminent reformer, had already been championing their cause. He had got a legislation legalising widow re-marriage passed, had laid a solid foundation for women's education and was carrying on a ceaseless campaign against polygamy. And all this he was doing in the face of fierce social opposition and bitter controversies. Naturally, Bankim could not have escaped these stirring trends. Besides, his early tutelage under Mill had made him an ardent advocate of liberty, not excluding women's emancipation from social disabilities. He comes out strongly against putting women in a position of inferiority and keeping them in eternal subjugation to men. He analyses faithfully the various social restrictions and taboos women

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\* *Bankim's Works*, Sahitya Sansad

were subjected to—denial of educational facilities, lack of freedom to move out of the household, deprivation of the right of inheritance, enforced widowhood, misery caused by polygamous husbands and various other disabilities. These, according to Bankim, are against the law of equality. Bankim, therefore, pleads for educating women to remove their inferior social status. Through education alone they would be able to stand on their own feet and even go out into the world earning their own living. Bankim regrets that there are many leagues and associations devoted to politics, society and religion—and even to the prevention of cruelty to animals—but none to the promotion of the women's cause.

But when it comes to specific questions, Bankim seems to qualify his ardour—to an extent at least. Perhaps the traditional idealism and sentiment attaching to the institutions of marriage gets mixed up with his otherwise unimpeachable rationalism. He says that widow re-marriage is neither good nor bad, because a widow who really loves her husband in his life-time would never like to marry again. But, of course, as a matter of principle, he fully concedes that a widow is as much entitled to marry as a widower. His thesis is that in social matters one is free to act according to one's inclination as long as this does not affect others' interest.\*

Once again he joins issue with Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar in connection with the latter's second tract against polygamy.\*\* Bankim admits that polygamy is an evil and that there is general agreement that it should go. But he cannot wholly approve of Vidyasagar's efforts to abolish it on the strength of prescriptions of *Dharmashastra*. Here also it is *Lokachar* or social custom which was proving a hurdle. Necessarily, seeking the sanction of *Dharmashastra* against polygamy, as Vidyasagar was doing, would be of no avail.

In social matters, therefore, Bankim was liberal in his views but cautious in his approach. He strongly felt that neither scriptural injunction nor legislative enactment would prevail against the strongly entrenched *Lokachar*, as was evidenced by the slackening of interest in Vidyasagar's widow re-marriage movement. In Bankim's opinion, therefore, a general improvement in the people's social and moral standard has to be brought about through education. "Education alone is the remedy against all

\* *Samya*, Bankim's Works, Sahitya Sansad

\*\* *Bahuvvaha*

kinds of social evils", he says \*

For Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar Bankim had a high regard. But the two strongly differed in their outlook and methodology. Vidyasagar made a three-pronged attack on the citadels of social bigotry and this he did through mass education and the moulding of public opinion with reference to the *Dharmashastra* and by invoking the rulers' aid in having progressive legislations enacted. Nobody was perhaps more conscious of the almost unbreakable binding force of irrational social customs than Vidyasagar. That perhaps was the reason why he made a triple approach to the problem. With Bankim, however, education came first. He felt that with the spread of education society itself would cast off its evil accretions and thus be reformed of itself. The two personalities showed the country's two different moods, Vidyasagar representing its early ardour for reform, Bankim its later moderation.

As a matter of fact the initial enthusiasm for reform had started cooling off. The great popular upsurge Vidyasagar's widow re-marriage movement had created in the fifties started quietening down by the sixties and the seventies. Besides his campaign against polygamy had also not been evoking enough enthusiasm.

The country's changed mood was being felt. A new theory was gaining ground—education, not legislation. In fact, the failure of Vidyasagar's widow re-marriage movement to gain increasing momentum showed that even a highly progressive measure could not be enforced by legislation unless public opinion had become informed enough to shake off age-old customs and thus to catch up with it. The Hindu religion was asserting itself, people felt that there was no need to be apologetic about anything going under its name and banner. Another idea seemed to have been gaining ground that political emancipation claimed a definite precedence over social emancipation and that the latter could wait, while the former could not. Later, social conferences went *pari passu* with the Congress sessions, but the emphasis was definitely on the latter.

In Maharashtra, the new mood started being reflected in the eighties and notably through Tilak. He had an additional point against legislation—interference by foreign rulers in such matters would rob the Indians of their socio-religious independence. And the point carried

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\* *Samya*

conviction. In 1889, when Pandita Ramabai had set up her Sharada Sadan, she came under a sharp attack from Tilak, because the latter and those of his way of thinking felt that the former was making Christian converts of Hindu widows. In connection with the controversy over the Age of Consent Bill sponsored by the Government in 1890, Tilak said, strikingly enough, in the accents of Bankim, that "education and not legislation is the proper method of eradicating the evil (child marriage) "

Bankim's socio-political ideas were the product of his liberal Western education and his own broad, human sympathies. Surely his official position was a drag upon his freedom of expression. But for that matter he did not refrain from giving vent to his views on social and political matters. He bitterly criticised several aspects of the British rule, including judicial discrimination in favour of the Europeans and the drain on India's resources. He never for a moment ceased to lend warm support to the cause of the peasantry, crushed under a patently unjust land tenure system introduced by the British. He never for a moment hesitated to give expression to his passionate, almost exuberant, love for his Motherland. In social matters *Samya* brings out his progressive outlook. The book, we are told, stood partly devalued in his own estimation at a later stage—that perhaps showed a sense of moderation coming upon him with maturity. But throughout his later works like *Krishnacharitra* and *Dharmatattwa*, his progressive social ideas are in evidence. His social progressivism was, however, moored to his faith in a regenerated Hinduism or Hinduism in its refined form. His conception of Hinduism itself became completely liberalised by the rationalism he had imbibed through his Western studies, as we shall see in the following chapter. His most important contribution to social thought was this. While devoutly wishing for a revival of Hinduism in its purest form, Bankim thought that whatever is laid down in *Dharmashastra* is not necessarily a part of, or of the essence of, Hindu religion and is thus not necessarily good for the society.\* This was a call for the liberation of mind from the bondage of blind, irrational customs and injunctions.

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\* *Bahuvvaha*

## The Kernel without the Husk

**T**HE RELIGIO-ETHICAL element is common to all Bankim's thinking, political as well as philosophical, and colours his entire mental horizon

As already noticed, he took his bearing against the background of a neo-Hindu renaissance. Hindu religion had suffered a good deal of indignity at the hands of its foreign detractors. While seeking to build the base of an Indian historiography, many Western Orientalists misunderstood and often misrepresented the country's cultural heritage. In many cases, the Christian missionaries too never cared to go into the essence of the Hindu religion and philosophy and highlighted only the popular and superstitious aspects thereof with a view to demeaning the same before the enlightened public. All this persistent campaign against Hinduism had gone on for quite a long time. Ram Mohan Roy was one of the earliest to have taken up the challenge. But, by the last third of the last century, more and more discerning Indians came forward spiritedly to defend their religio-cultural heritage on the basis of a revival of their ancient history and sacred texts. A vigorous defence of the old faith thus ensued. No detailed reference is necessary here to the role played by the Arya Samaj, Ramkrishna Paramahansa and the Theosophical movement in the renaissance of the ancient culture and faith. But other organisations also came up, some of them perhaps narrowly sectarian. The reaction against the denigration of Hinduism was so extreme that in many cases anything in the name of Hinduism or Indian, including even irrational social customs, came to be glorified. The superiority of the Indian culture over the Western was sought to be zealously established. And in some cases an element of race-consciousness got mixed up with the enthusiasm.

This new urge branched off in several directions. One of its extreme forms was represented by Pandit Shashadhar Tarkachuramoni, an erudite scholar, whose devotion to the Hindu faith was so great that he interpreted the Puranic ritualism and ceremonialism in pseudo-scientific terms.

In Bankim, however, Hinduism found a very rational and, one might say, universal expression. He avoided both extremes of the ceremonialism of Tarkachuramoni and the radicalism of the Brahmos, he steered a middle course. Moreover, in his reinterpretation of Hinduism, he adopted Western methodology based on a rational spirit of enquiry and research. Without being a historian he was one of the founders of Indian historiography and archaeology. With his mind purged of all narrownesses by his early Western schooling, he set about clearing Hinduism of all its popular accretions—the dogmas, superstitions and irrational customs attaching to it. His aim was to get at the essence of Hinduism and thus put it on a footing of pure monotheism. His passion for representing the Hindu religion as purged of all its dross burns bright in many of his works. Religion aims at the all-round development of man. Whatever conduces to man's all-round welfare is *Dharma*. Proceeding on this assumption, he says that what is contrary to this cannot be *Dharma*, even if enjoined by the highest scriptures\*. The polytheism inherent in Hinduism was a frequent target of attack by foreigners. Bankim says that the Hindu worship of the different forces of Nature is the worship of God Himself through His manifestations. The different deities of the Hindu pantheon basically represent one God, for, there is only one God and no other God, by whatever name one may call Him\*\*. God's incarnation is necessary only for the popular representation of His divinity. But as culture advances polytheism loses its spell. Bankim was essentially a monotheist. But he had no use for Vedantic abstractions, he did not believe in an Impersonal God whom one cannot worship. He was passionately a believer in a Personal God like Krishna who could body forth before the people the various qualities whose cultivation to the point of perfection constitutes *Dharma* in Bankim's estimation.

Possibly the freethinker Bankim had to go through a period of inner conflict in his effort to reconcile his Western rationalism with his Eastern

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\* *Devatattva O Hindu Dharma*

\*\* *Ibid*

faith But he eventually was able to synthesise them through his reinterpretation of the Hindu faith "Evidently the views on man and the universe held by thinkers like Mill, Spencer and Darwin have vitally affected the author's (Bankim's) interpretation of the Hindu religion and philosophy, but the profoundest influence of all has been that of Auguste Comte whose Positive Polity and Religion unconsciously appear in everything our author Bankim has to say on domestic, social and political ideas and institutions \*\* Not only that The same philosophers, notably Comte, have left an equally profound impression upon his reinterpretation of Hindu religion and philosophy The result has been that Bankim's Hinduism soars far above narrowness and sectarianism which often mar the over-enthusiastic phases of a religious revival He brings out the universal essence of Hinduism and pleads for its acceptance He speaks in the accents of Hinduism but the spirit animating his speech is universal. Indeed it is his endeavour to prove that Hinduism contains elements which could not be unacceptable to any other religion He says that *Chittashuddhi* or the purification of the heart has three elements in it, love of God, love of the world and mental peace, which are the essence of all religions, including Christianity, Islam and Buddhism, but is the most dominant feature of Hinduism \*\* He says "Whatever is set down in the *Dharmashastra* is not necessarily Hindu *Dharma* Hindu *Dharma* is very liberal"† Whatever narrowness has entered into it is, in his opinion, a matter of historical growth Hindu *Dharma* existed long before the *Shastras* came into existence It contains elements which are universal and hence he calls it eternal religion, it being true, in its essence, for all time and for all mankind Indeed the preceptor in *Dharmatattwa* raises religion to a non-denominational plane when he says that the essence of *Dharma* is true for all mankind, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims ‡

By a process of rejection and elimination Bankim reduces Hinduism to such an essential form that it has nothing in it that smacks of sectarianism or narrowness He explains away Hindu polytheism as being an aspect of all ancient religions seeking for the external, visible and concrete representation of God who is basically one He dismisses idolatry

\* *New Essays in Criticism*, B N Seal

\*\* *Chittashuddhi, Vividha Prabandha*, Part II

† Letter to Benoy Krishna Deb, *Bankim's Works*, Sahitya Sansad

‡ *Dharmatattwa*, Chapter 3



as being an inessential part of Hinduism, it being just an expression of the natural human desire to see the Ideal represented as the Real. Even Hindu rituals as such do not appeal to him, he rejects most of them as sheer "mummery"\*, a ceremony without reality. He cries down caste consideration as having been responsible for India's decline. He repudiates blind acceptance of anything that has been set down in the *Dharmashastra* as true religion. In effect he raises a banner of revolt against popular Hinduism with all the crusts of customs and rituals which have grown around it through the centuries of its ancient existence. Tagore pays a high tribute to him for having had, even in the face of prevalent orthodoxy and unreason, the extraordinary courage to scatter the age-old superstitions and thus set about rediscovering the essence of the Hindu religion. His efforts to resuscitate Hinduism bear the marks of modern trends of thought. As R. C. Dutt says, he sought to create harmony out of disharmony, bring in liberality in an atmosphere of illiberality, lighten up the darkness of ignorance by the pure knowledge of Hinduism, show the path of progress in a decadent society and replace lifeless ritualism by the life-giving power of the ancient faith.\*\*

His interpretation of the character and message of Krishna is an eloquent illustration. He personally believes that Krishna is an incarnation of God. But why should God choose to incarnate Himself in human form? Bankim would reply that in this way He seeks to set up certain ideals before humanity with a view to establishing a regime of righteousness. The infinite Godhead is manifest in the finite Krishna. But it is with his finite aspect, that is, with Krishna as man, that Bankim is primarily concerned. Clearing him of all accumulated accretions, he establishes Krishna as a historical person having the most perfect blend of the highest human qualities and representing the high water mark of human perfection. And Krishna, as Bankim sees him, has nothing denominational or exclusive about him, he preaches a message that is universal and valid for all time and for all mankind without any distinction whatsoever.

Hinduism has, in Bankim's opinion, three bases to stand upon—doctrinal, ritual and ethical. The Hinduism Bankim preaches is a religion of

\* Letters in the Hastie Controversy, III, *Bankim's Works*, Centenary Edition, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad.

\*\* *Sahitya Parishad Patrika*, Shravan, 1301 (B.S.)

ethics, not of metaphysics or ceremonialism. Indeed in *Dharmatattwa* he reduces it to a code of principles to be followed in human conduct, both individual and social. Hinduism, he says, is a complete religion and leaves no part of the human life out of its purview.

How far the Western philosophers influenced Bankim's thinking will be interesting to see. Comte and the utilitarians impressed him most. Comte envisages the progression of human knowledge from the theological or supernatural stage through the metaphysical or abstract stage to that of positive experience. He has nothing to do with metaphysical speculation, positive experience being the only source of knowledge for him. He admits man's inherent craving for worshipping a Being, but substitutes the cult of God with the cult of humanity. Comte's positive philosophy stresses only what he calls "social morality", for, from society to humanity it is but a step. Humanity, according to Comte, is the final substitute for God, the Great Being constituted by Beings past, present and future, "the continuous whole formed by Beings which converge"\* Comte's positive world encourages complete expansion of benevolent acts and sympathetic emotions towards the whole human race and makes the individual happiness dependent thereon.

Utilitarianism is an ethical theory based on the principle of the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Its core is hedonism, though universalistic hedonism, and its moral criterion is general happiness. But why should an individual seek to promote the happiness of the community? Mill says that this is because individual pleasure is bound up with the pleasure of others. Bentham however thinks of sanctions to enforce the sacrifice of individual pleasure or happiness for the general good. There are differences of opinion about the soundness of the utilitarian theory. But one fact is obvious. It produces important results in the political field, concerned as it is with the welfare of the people in general, with human life, human activity and human well-being.

Under the complementary influence of positivism and utilitarianism, Bankim steers clear of both theological unrealism and metaphysical abstraction to arrive at a conception of religion which, in effect, means the development of the humanity of man and relating him simultaneously to both the spiritual and the social contexts. So far as the individual is

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\* *The Positive Philosophy*, Martineau

concerned, his humanity, his happiness, his *Dharma*, all consist in a harmonious development of his faculties tending to produce in his mind the sentiment of devotion to God. Comte's religion too, a positive religion as it is, aims at a stage of perfect unity when all the constituent parts of his nature, moral and physical, are made to converge towards a common purpose. In the case of Comte the point of convergence is humanity, in the case of Bankim, it is both God and humanity, since humanity is, in his estimation, nothing if not a manifestation of divinity. Bankim thinks that the ethical portion of Hinduism is positive philosophy in concrete form and says that if the profoundest of the 19th century European thinkers, meaning Comte, had been acquainted with India, he would have found the dream of his positive polity fulfilled here thousands of years ago with remarkable success\*. The reason is that Hinduism does not seek God in isolation from humanity but in and through it.

Here also lies the key to Bankim's deep intellectual affiliation to utilitarianism. If Hinduism, as Bankim says, recognises divinity in all created beings, the core of utilitarianism may be said to be inherent in it. A significant part of man's *Dharma* is therefore to love all created beings and make for their welfare. Without this even the love of God is not possible. That is why the preceptor says in *Dharmatattwa* that "man cannot practise *Dharma* outside the framework of the society"\*\*\* and that "above everything else is the love of the country"†. Not only this. Bankim infuses the essence of utilitarianism into his own conception of Hinduism when, in interpreting Krishna and his Message, he says that whatever sustains or protects man is *Dharma*†. We find this thesis elaborated again and again in many of his writings, notably *Krishnacharitra* and *Dharmatattwa*, wherein he stresses man's social context being as important as his spiritual aspirations.

Bankim's interpretation of Hinduism and the essence of Hindu philosophy may be summed up thus. In his opinion Hinduism enjoins upon man a balanced development of all his faculties ultimately creating in his mind what he calls devotion to God. It requires of man to have an implicit faith in the existence of God and His invisible presence in all created

\* Letters in the Hastie Controversy, III, *Bankim's Works*, Centenary Edition, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad.

\*\* *Dharmatattwa*, Chapter 24.

† *Dharmatattwa*, Chapter 28.

‡ *Krishnacharitra*, Part VI, Chapter 6.

beings To love them is his religious-cum-moral duty In this way an individual is linked up with the social context within the framework of humanity Bankim's man is primarily a social man, not a metaphysical man Nor is he a spiritual recluse or an escapist from society seeking salvation in isolation from humanity He must fulfil his social obligations, first and foremost including those to his country, so that he can fulfil his spiritual obligations

Bankim's philosophy is an amalgam of positivism and utilitarianism with something of his own added to it, and that is his passionate belief in the existence of God, and a personal God at that It is there that he differs from the European masters of thought He borrows from them the conception of positive morality and science worship but adds to the same his own inherent faith in God which, as an Indian and a devout Hindu, is his inheritance from his ancient tradition and culture He considers faith in God as fundamental to a perfect religion and devotion to Him as the most important element in man's philosophy of life He says "I accept the worship of a personal God as the highest perfection in religion A personal God alone realises the highest and most perfect ideal of the God, the Beautiful and the True"\* For Comte, humanity is the final substitute for God, for Bankim humanity is a manifestation of God, and love of humanity, a means of realising Him. Then again, so far as happiness, as understood by the utilitarians, is concerned, Bankim is also a believer in human good and happiness But it is not material happiness alone he is thinking of It is an all-round happiness that is not transient, a lasting bliss born of the due exercise of all human faculties, spiritual, moral and social In *Dharmatattwa* the preceptor calls utilitarianism an important, but a partial, philosophy\*\* Add to it devotion and love, and you have a perfect philosophical system Devotion and love are the two most important elements Bankim introduces in his philosophy to relieve positivism of its purely mundane character and utilitarianism of its purely hedonistic accent In other words, he adds to these two philosophies based on science and rationalism the spiritual core so characteristic of Indian civilisation and culture

Bankim has been called the high priest of nationalism But with him nationalism is not a matter of romantic fancy or political excitement

\* Letters on Hinduism, III

\*\* *Dharmatattwa*, Chapter 22

His ideas of nationalism are deeply rooted in his philosophical or ethical system. Primarily he is a lover of humanity at large. He equates *Dharma*, with selfless love, both converging towards the same point. When love embraces the whole world, it becomes *Dharma*, and *Dharma* itself remains incomplete unless and until it manifests itself as love for the whole world \*. This idea he derived partly from the positivists and partly from the pacific universalism of the Hindu religion. He thinks in terms of an ever-widening circle of love. This, however, must begin from man's own self, extend to his kith and kin, then spread to the society or the country and finally embrace the whole world. But in order that a sound internationalism or universalism may be established, one must devote oneself, first and foremost, to one's own country whose service is most important, next only to the worship of God. The defence of one's country is a God-ordained task, because outside the framework of one's country or society one cannot practise *Dharma*. He, therefore, envisages sound nationalism as a basis for universalism. He is aware that there is no dearth of power-loving and aggressive nations in the world which are ready to grab others' territories for their narrow and selfish interests. If such forces have their way in the world, the entire human society will be in jeopardy, and the rule of ethics will cease. Therefore, a man must resist such unrighteous forces if attacked by them. In that situation, the defence of his country becomes a man's prime obligation \*\*. Bankim's nationalism is based on moral values, but it does not mean surrender to the forces of power-lust and aggression.

That he was fully aware of such forces is evident from the preceptor's reference to European patriotism in *Dharmatattwa*. The preceptor is highly critical of European patriotism which, he thinks, consists in enriching one's own country at the expense of others', he calls it a sin. But two important ingredients of Bankim's patriotism are love and what he calls *Sama-darshan* or a fair-minded view, treating all alike. He envisages a self-contented patriotism which certainly makes for a country's welfare but not at the cost of another country. He has a pacific-universalistic conception of international relations, an idealistic view which

\* *Bhalobasar Atyachar, Vividha Prabandha I*

\*\* *Dharmatattwa*, Chapter 24

largely ignores the devious forces and counter-forces which go into the shaping of world politics. Aware of the selfish forces which bring about wars and destruction, for which he has nothing but a deep contempt, he stresses the urgency of moral values in building up a sound, pacific and healthy nationalism. The Hindu ethics "is also a system of policy", he says. He, therefore, stresses the moral values inherent in that system on which alone can healthy nationalism take its stand.

Bankim has been described as a Hindu revivalist or Hindu nationalist. Most of the foreigners who have written on him have described him thus. For instance, Mr T W Clark says that "the nationalism which Bankim's writings foreshadowed was Hindu nationalism" \*. Why foreigners alone? Even Indian writers and intellectuals are accustomed to think of him in terms of a Hindu revivalist. Was he a revivalist, a Hindu revivalist or the leader of a Hindu revival? This public image of Bankim has to be scrutinised dispassionately.

Revivalism implies turning back to the past. In that sense revivalism began with Ram Mohan Roy who, with all his Western orientation, tried to restore or revive the true spirit of Hinduism. The desire to revive the true spirit of Hinduism, an important aspect of the Indian renaissance, was present in varying degrees in most of the reformers. In other words, renaissance and reformation went hand in hand. But, as stated earlier, the first phase of the reawakening was marked by Western emphasis, sometimes overdone. Its second phase, one of a reaction, in a way, was characterised by the accents of Hinduism, sometimes too loud. Belonging to the second phase of the reawakening, Bankim believed fervently in the superiority of the Hindu religion and desired the revival of its pristine essence as a social, moral and spiritual guideline for his countrymen. If this means revivalism, Bankim was of course a revivalist. But, as already noted, he never suffered from sectarianism or obscurantism of any sort. The result is that his conception of Hinduism is liberal and universal, purged of all its external and inessential adhesions and reduced to what may be called pure essence. In reinterpreting Hinduism, he puts before his countrymen what he calls "the kernel with-

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\* *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, Ed by C H Philips

out the husk '\* These are not the marks of a revivalist thinking, if at all, it is not revivalism in any narrow sense of the term

Invoking the past at times means turning one's back upon the present and the future. In many cases revivalism is an easy escape from the challenge of the present. But Bankim is far from being an escapist or a renegade from reality. He never fails to harmonise his ideas derived from the past with the contemporary society. Nowhere does he ignore the current actualities, nor does he hesitate to look ahead towards the future. Indeed his efforts to resuscitate India's glorious past are closely linked with his keen awareness of the prevailing moral and social conditions. The way he drank deep from the fountain of Western rationalism and allowed himself to be under its influence till the last is an important point. His vigorous rejection of theological supernaturalism or metaphysical abstractions, his well-argued blueprint for a positive religion and positive morality, his advocacy of scientific materialism, though not without a spiritual base, are factors which mark him out as a man of keen contemporary consciousness. Above all his passionate nationalism, whose absence in ancient India he regrets again and again, brings him out as a thoroughly modern thinker looking forward to his country's regeneration through a magnificent outburst of patriotism. Whenever he deals with Hindu religion and ethics, he never fails to show that a Hindu's spiritual and material life must be linked together in a complementary way to make him a whole man. In other words, he has not used Hindu religion and ethics as an apology for harking back to the pristine past but has interpreted the same in such a way as to further his country's social and political thinking—to take it forward, not backward. If this is revivalism, it is a very refined revivalism.

It should be remembered that revivalism was already in the air, sometimes in an extreme form, it started in full swing in Bengal from about 1870. Bankim imbibed the spirit and, for his part, reflected it on the society through his writings which exercised a profound influence on contemporary thinking. But, as already noted, he presented Hinduism in a balanced, rational and refined form. He never allowed the voice of reason to be drowned by obscurantism or unenlightened faith. As

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\* Letters in the Haste Controversy, III, *Bankim's Works*, Centenary Edition, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad

Dr Tarachand says, his Hinduism embraces the whole of man and his purpose is to develop an independence of outlook, to overthrow the domination of Western thought and to speak to the masses in the language they understand \* It is to be noticed that Bankim's interpretation of Hinduism is markedly different from the philosophical doctrines of Arya Samaj, the Theosophical Society and the Ramkrishna movement It also stands sharply differentiated from the orthodoxy and sectarian outlook which started crystallising in certain sectors of the society from 1870 onwards

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\* *History of the Freedom Movement*, Vol II



## The Message that Moved

CONTEMPORARY EVIDENCE shows that Bankim did not take kindly to the idea of English translation of his works. Suresh Samajpati, a well-known litterateur of that time, tells us about Bankim's dislike of his books being translated into English.\* Bankim's own efforts in the matter were confined to a part translation of *Bishabriksha* meant to be presented to Lady Elliot, wife of the then Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, and the English rendering of *Devi Chaudhurani*, only a portion of which is available in print.\*\*

But whether he liked it or not, several of his novels were done into English even during his life time and, of course, following his death, for instance, *Kapalkundala* by G. K. Ghosh in the *National Magazine*, Calcutta, 1876-77, *Durgeshnandini* by C. C. Mukherji, 1880, *Bishabriksha* by Miriam Knight with a preface by Edwin Arnold, 1884, London, *Krishnakanter Will* by Miriam Knight, 1895, *Kapalkundala* by H. A. D. Phillips, 1885, London, and others. Gradually more and more of his works came to be rendered in English. *Anandamath*, his intensely patriotic work, was translated into English by N. C. Sen Gupta during the peak of the anti-partition movement in 1906 and later by the Ghosh brothers, Aurobindo and Barindra. Some of the Bankim fictions were done into German, Swedish and Russian. Miriam Knight did a lot to popularise his works in England. That he was well-known to the English literary circles is evident from an interesting poetic reference to *Bishabriksha* in the *Punch*† from the appreciations of foreign critics and from the importance assigned to him in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Although, as J. D. Anderson says, trans-

\* *Sekaler Smriti*, Narayan, Magh, 1321 (B.S.)

\*\* *Bankim's Works*, Centenary Edition, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad

† *Londoner Punch* Bankim Chandra, Kamal Sarkar, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, November 8, 1964

lation of his works was not easy, specially because of the Sanskritic association of the words,\* yet the translations seem to have been well-received in foreign literary circles

But it is not his recognition abroad that is of interest here. The material point, on the contrary, is that through the English translations of his works, the whole of India could acquaint itself with his literary creations and thoughts

But English was not the only language through which Bankim's works and ideas travelled all over India. It is striking indeed that in those days when literary communication was not much in vogue or easy, his works had started receiving all-India currency through translations into various Indian languages. Indeed, he is one of the most translated among the Bengali authors, his works having been rendered in almost all the major Indian languages. This is an index to his all-India popularity. Some of his works have more than one version in the same language. According to a bibliography prepared by the National Library, Calcutta, there are seven different translations of *Anandamath* and six of *Devī Chaudhurani* in Hindi. Similarly, *Durgeshnandini* has been translated seven times into Hindi, the language which claims the largest number of such translations. Also translated into Hindi are *Dharmatattwa*, *Krishnacharitra* and *Kamala kanter Daptar*. Similarly Marathi, Gujarati, Tamil and Telugu also claim quite a number of Bankim translations. According to the same bibliography, the earliest translation of any Bankim work in any Indian language appears to have been the Urdu version of *Durgeshnandini* by K. Krishna, Lucknow, 1876. Between 1876 and 1900, that is, partly during his lifetime, several of his novels, notably the patriotic ones like *Durgeshnandini*, *Anandamath*, *Devī Chaudhurani* and *Rajsinha*, had appeared in some of the major Indian languages like Hindi, Marathi, Urdu, Telugu, Kannada and so on. Even as early as in 1885, Kannada had a version of *Durgeshnandini*, while *Dharmatattwa* first appeared in Hindi in 1883. By the first decade of the current century most of his works had got rendered in important Indian languages. Thus the entire country had an easy access to his art and technique, his thoughts and ideas, particularly, his soul-stirring message of patriotism—through English, the then link language, on the one hand, and more particularly, through the translations

\* *Why I Translated Indira and Other Stories*, *Modern Review*, January 1919

into the Indian languages, on the other Bankim's popularity seems to continue unabated even now in the vastly changed perspective of modern fiction. Translation of his works seems to be a continuing process—some of them were done into Hindi as late as between 1963 and 1965. From the provincial plane he thus rose to all-India eminence leaving a deep impression not only on the realm of literature but also on the realm of thought

Bankim's claim to be ranked among the builders of modern India rests mainly upon the gospel of nationalism he preached through his works. In the emotional sphere he created an upsurge of patriotism through his historical and semi-historical novels and other writings like *Kamalakanter Daptar*. In history it is seen that a great political upheaval is often preceded by a great literary revival. Romantic idealism in literature is very often a powerful factor for patriotic or political upsurge or struggle for freedom. This happened in the case of the French Revolution. B. C. Pal compares Bankim and his fellow writers to Voltaire and the Encyclopaedists.\* Bankim's historical and semi-historical novels are packed with the most fervent patriotic sentiments having an electrifying effect on the readers. He preached vigorous patriotism at a time when Indian nationalism had just got going with a pace neither too bold nor too assertive. Urging people to identify themselves completely with the Motherland, he imparted to nationalism a religious compulsion. He knew that nothing appealed to the Indian mind more than religion. Hence he raised nationalism to the level of religion by identifying the Motherland with the Mother-Goddess. Not only that. He interpreted nationalism in such a manner as to make it a high spiritual ideal. The tremendous impact *Anandamath* and *Vande Mataram* produced on the Indian national movement is a fact of history. *Anandamath*, says Dr. B. B. Majumdar, has produced no less an influence on modern Indian history than that of Rousseau's *Social Contract* on France during the latter half of the 18th century.\*\* T. W. Clark sums up Bankim's contribution to the growth of Indian nationalism saying that *Anandamath* was his "greatest contribution to the early growth of nationalism" and that "the two words, *Bande Mataram* soon became one of the most emotion-charged

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\* *My Life and Times*

\*\* *Indian Social and Political Ideas*

slogans of the modern times!''\* Not only *Anandamath* but his other novels like *Rajsinha*, *Durgeshnandini*, *Dev Choudhuran*, *Sitaram* and so on had a similar effect

But with Bankim nationalism was not just an emotional urge, he was more emphatic on its constructive aspect. One must initiate oneself devoutly into the creed of nationalism and act with the self-sacrifice and discipline it calls for. Lack of self-reliance he regretted much. Politics of begging and ragging and unreal agitations in the Press and on the platform he considered of no value. He thought it imperative to mould the people's character and make them respectful to their national heritage and their language, literature and culture, throwing aside blind imitation of the West. A sturdy nationalism rooted in the soil, nurtured by a sense of pride in, and respect for, the national heritage and history, and strengthened by the strong fabric of national morals, was his most precious gift to his country. In his philosophy the country ranks next only to God in importance. In other words, worship of God minus love for the country has no meaning in Bankim's thought pattern.

Apart from the general regeneration Bankim's thoughts and ideas kindled, they seem to have produced a deep impact on the new nationalism, also called extremism. Being born in the eighties of the last century, it became the most dominant note of Indian politics during the first two decades of the current century, and that under the leadership of Tilak in Maharashtra, Lajpat Rai in Punjab and B C Pal and Aurobindo in Bengal.

What indeed were the characteristics of the new nationalism? Broadly speaking, it represented a strong reaction against the constitutional agitation carried on by the liberal leaders, against their politics of mendicancy, as some have called it. It simultaneously introduced into nationalism a strong sense of assertion and even of defiance. Not that Bankim preached militancy in any direct manner. Even then his novels like *Durgeshnandini*, *Mrinalini*, *Rajsinha*, *Anandamath* and *Sitaram*, are all pitched to the same key—struggle for freedom or self-defence, in other words, people's patriotic obligation of defending their country or society against external attacks or oppression under an unrighteous regime. Like Bankim the new

\* *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, Ed. by C. H. Philips

nationalists too disdained the politics of prayers and petitions and pious resolutions to achieve the desired end. Bankim had realized the futility of this type of agitation unless and until the nation stood on the basis of self-reliance, self-sacrifice and a renaissance of national values.

Bankim made a significant contribution to the revival of the country's ancient past which constituted the bed-rock of the new nationalism. The liberals seemed to think that the Western pattern of polity could be almost mechanically reproduced in India. The new nationalists strongly repudiated this. At a time when the country was passing through a crisis of culture, Bankim gave a powerful reinterpretation of the Hindu religion and helped revive a sense of pride in it. He boosted the people's morale by telling them in a forthright manner that there was no need to be on the defensive regarding the Hindu religion which, in its purest form, stood in its own right. In a large measure the new nationalism took its stand on the revival of the past and a rejection of the West. Both Tilak and Lajpat Rai were opposed to Western imitation. Tilak's opposition to the reform movements sprang, among other things, from his opposition to a servile copying of the West. He too believed in the superiority of the Hindu religion. For Aurobindo, nationalism was the soul's hunger for the rebirth of India. It is noticeable that like Bankim the champions of the new nationalism drew their inspiration from the ancient Indian epics and religious texts.

In point of fact the new nationalism was not a civil or a political urge, it was a religion in itself. This, in other words, was further projection of Bankim's ideas thereof. As already noted, Bankim had raised nationalism to the status and dignity of a religion, first, by identifying the Motherland with the Mother-Goddess and, then, by making service to the country an organic part of a man's religious and spiritual obligations. The new nationalists went further. They rejected the Western idea of a nation based merely on common territorial and civic interests and projected the idea of a nation based on cultural unity and spiritual content having a unique personality of its own. Aurobindo, the high priest of the new nationalism, created a metaphysics of patriotism based on the renaissance of old values. In his opinion the Mother, who is identified with the Motherland, is not just a stretch of land or a division of a territory, she is a living entity in whom her children move and have their being. B. C. Pal gave to nationalism a religious aura. In his opinion the Mother has a

personality of her own. Our history, he thinks, is the sacred biography of the Mother. For Aurobindo again Indian nationalism is synonymous with *Sanatan Dharma* (the expression is strikingly reminiscent of Bankim). Tilak, who appealed to the people's religious sentiments through the Ganapati festival, also associated *Dharma* with politics. The new nationalists represented India "as a Mother-Goddess and made use of Puja, the worship of the Hindu Goddesses, and the Ganesh festival, connected with a Hindu god, to instil enthusiasm into the people for political causes"\* But in a large measure politics and religion became mixed up, or rather, politics itself became religion. In Bengal at least this was particularly so, because there the upsurge was more emotional than practical, unlike in Maharashtra, where it was more political than emotional. In any case, it was Bankim who popularised the idea of conceiving the Motherland as the Mother-Goddess. He also pictured some of the popular gods and goddesses of Hinduism as the representations of the different aspects or manifestations of the Mother, thus creating a new myth of patriotism out of the old and traditional legendary lore.

Lastly the new nationalism was more democratic and tended towards the masses, being closer to the language of the people. As already noted, Bankim was basically a champion of the masses and of mass education, an ardent advocate of the cause of the exploited peasantry and opposed to man-made social discrimination. He also pleaded for the use of the mother tongue for the purpose of educating the people. His nationalism was mass-based and not elite-based, unlike the liberal politics of the day. That also was the character of the new nationalism which tended to take politics out of the meeting halls and council chambers to the wider sphere of mass participation and mass action. The new creed had a tremendous popular appeal. The new cult bodied itself forth in the magnetic personality of Tilak, in the inspiring message of Aurobindo and in the fiery preachings of Pal.

The new nationalism made its appearance in Maharashtra towards the end of the last century under the leadership of Tilak and went on gathering momentum till it became a mighty force at the beginning of the current century. Tilak had contact with Phadke who was the first<sup>9</sup> to make an armed revolutionary attempt after the Mutiny. Under him

\* *Continuity and Change in Indian Politics*, Karunakaran

Tilak wanted to learn marksmanship apparently with revolutionary intent but eventually turned away from that path to that of kindling a national renaissance \* In Bengal too, the stirrings of a new nationalist sentiment were felt, though not very articulately, long before the partition of Bengal gave it an opportunity to assert itself It is interesting to see that the faint beginnings of this type of nationalism could be seen in the writings and activities of Rajnarain Basu, an eminent writer, Bankim's contemporary and the maternal grandfather of Aurobindo As noted earlier, Bankim too might have heard and read about Phadke and his exploits before writing his *Anandamath*. Phadke thought of dacoity for revolutionary purposes In *Anandamath* and *Dev Chaudhurani* we find dacoity being committed for political and social purposes respectively. In any case Bankim started preaching his vigorous nationalistic ideas from the seventies onwards, he was unsparing in his criticism of the unreal politics of the day lacking in mass contact and mass support By the time the new nationalism made its appearance in Maharashtra some of Bankim's major works had been done into English and notably into Marathi, including two Marathi versions of *Rajsinha* Presumably by the end of the last century Bankim's soul-stirring message of patriotism had reached Maharashtra, then in the process of a new nationalistic awakening Also his message had apparently spread to other parts of the country, specially because by that time some of his major patriotic fictions had appeared in several Indian languages including Urdu and Hindi

The two streams of nationalism originating in Bengal and Maharashtra met and mingled in the first decade of this century and that through the movement against the Bengal partition At this time one more factor produced a deep impression on Bengal's political climate—it was the neo-Vedantism preached by Swami Vivekananda Noticeably, Vivekananda had inherited Bankim's sturdy patriotism and his vision of the Motherland but differed from him on the philosophical plane. Bankim preached a religion tinged with utilitarianism and nationalism as a part of religious obligation But Vivekananda preached the message of fearlessness as contained in the Upanishads and urged his countrymen to be bold and shed fear and cowardice Both the systems of thought had similar

\* *Lokmanya Tilak*, Tahmankar

effects on nationalism in Bengal. The Bengal nationalism was emotional, romantic, pouring itself out not only in massive public protests but also in an exuberance of literary creations, including soul-stirring patriotic songs, some of which were glorifying the Motherland in the words and accents of Bankim. Nationalism was blossoming forth through art, literature, music and religion. The seeds of nationalism sown in the second half of the 19th century were sprouting out in a magnificent foliage, and among those who had sown the seeds Bankim shone most. It may not be an exaggeration to say that Bankim's thoughts and ideas, his dreams and visions, his hopes and aspirations, formed the theoretical background for the anti-partition movement and Swadeshi upheaval. The intellectual as well as emotional base of the great political movement had been built long ago by Bankim.

The Maharashtra nationalism, which was more practical than emotional, was also based on a revival of the past. One of the secrets of Tilak's magic hold on the masses was his deep regard for India's ancient tradition and culture. Through his Ganapati and Shivaji festivals he electrified the people and brought them on to a common platform. He represented Shivaji as a national hero who, according to him, was against tyranny and injustice and not against the Muslims as such. That is how Bankim too represented Rajsinha and Sitaram, though in different contexts.

When Tilak's philosophy of defiance mingled with the lyrical nationalism of Bengal, it became a powerful current rolling all over India. Under Tilak's leadership "the whole of India from Calcutta in the east to Karachi in the west and from Delhi in the north to Madras in the south voiced its indignation against the partition and its sincere sympathy for Bengal" \*.

It is interesting to recall how Bengal's historical prejudice against the Mahrattas (owing to the Mahratta invasion of Bengal in the late 18th century) was completely changed overnight under Tilak's spell with the result that Bengal began to look upon Shivaji as a national figure and a source of inspiration in national struggle. A new hero-worship centreing round Shivaji began amidst great enthusiasm. Shivaji festivals were celebrated in Calcutta from 1902 to 1906. In 1904, Tagore wrote his

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\* *Lokmanya Tilak*, Tahmankar



famous poem on Shivaji Tilak himself was present at the 1906 festival. It was a great meeting of mind between Bengal and Maharashtra. The call for Swaraj, Swadeshi, boycott and national education was shared equally intensely by both. Indeed the Swadeshi movement was the first real mass movement which radically changed the look of the country's politics. Originating in Bengal it raised India-wide echoes. Dr R. C. Majumdar refers to confidential official reports showing how the fervour of the Swadeshi movement spread to the rest of India even by the end of 1905—to U P, C P, Maharashtra, Punjab and the Madras Presidency.\* As already noted much of the groundwork of the movement had been prepared by Bankim.

There are some striking parallelisms between Bankim and Tilak, 18 years his junior. Believers in the superiority of the Hindu religion, both looked forward to a renaissance before revolution. Both were strongly opposed to slavish imitation of the West. While appreciating the value of the English language, they supported the cause of the Indian languages. Neither would favour legislative interference in social matters. Both frowned upon politics of petition and tended towards the masses. Both drew inspiration from religious texts, notably the *Gita*, and were given to the interpretation of the same. Both associated religious sentiments with nationalism. But of course Bankim was a thinker, while Tilak was primarily a man of action, despite his being a thinker as well. That is an important difference.

In a large measure Bankim's works were a source of inspiration to the revolutionary militancy, commonly known as terrorism, which made itself widely manifest in Bengal in the wake of the Swadeshi movement. The nationalistic fervour had risen to a high pitch—a new impetus to independence had been received from the victory of an Asian country in the Russo-Japanese War. The writings of Bankim and the preachings of Vivekananda formed an impressive ideological background. Currents of the new nationalism were sweeping the country. At the same time frustration over the futility of the prevalent methods of political agitation was driving the youth to desperation. On top of all came the crushing bureaucratic blow in the shape of the partition of Bengal and the reign of terror let loose upon the patriots who dared raise their voice against it.

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\* *History of Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. II

The inevitable result was the emergence of the cult of the bomb and the pistol and of political dacoities. The early revolutionary efforts of an amateurish nature hardened with the partition indignity and other wrongs. Many secret societies sprang up all over Bengal aimed at overthrowing the British Government by the methods of terrorism. One school of thought favoured the import of foreign arms to prepare for a militant uprising, another school felt that the administration itself could be paralysed by the assassination of European officials. The methods adopted were the manufacture of bombs, the collection of arms, dacoities and the murder of officials and spies.

It is to be noted that the most powerful of all those societies, the Anushilan Samity, having many branches all over the province, and also having some top revolutionaries associated with it, derived its name from Bankim's work *Dharmatattwa-Anushilan*. Not only in name but in substance too it tried to approximate to the ideals set forth in the book, namely, an all-round development of personality with particular emphasis on physical culture. But its main purpose was to organise revolutionary activities. It is to be noticed that *Vande Mataram* was a part of the oath the revolutionaries were required to take. The vow itself which enjoined upon the members rigid discipline, complete renunciation of wordly ties and readiness for self-sacrifice, was exactly on the lines of the pledge the *Santans* had to take in *Anandamath*. Aurobindo, who deeply imbibed the ideas of Bankim, was a source of revolutionary inspiration, while his brother Barindra, was the spearhead of revolutionary activity. A book entitled *Bhowani Mandir* attributed to Aurobindo envisaged the setting up of a religious sanctuary in a place far removed from human habitation and the din and bustle of cities which was to be the abode of a batch of political *Sannyasis* dedicated to the task of the country's emancipation. The worship of Bhowani as an incarnation of Shakti and stress on the development of physical strength were to be part of the activities in that projected revolutionary sanctuary. Doubtless the book, which finds mention in the Sedition Committee's report of 1918, was inspired by Bankim's idea of a similar monastery of political *Sannyasis* as depicted in *Anandamath*. Aurobindo's own journal was named *Vande Mataram*. Another periodical named *Yugantar* (New Era) spread revolutionary fervour. Funds being necessary for secret revolutionary activities, political dacoities took place galore. In a large measure Bankim's *Anandamath* and *Dev*

*Chaudhurani* appear to have provided the clue. The revolutionaries were imbued with a spirit of complete self-sacrifice for the sake of the country's freedom—they were committed to a "Do or Die" cult, like the *Santans* of *Anandamath*. The soul-stirring pledge—"I shall sacrifice my life for the freedom of my country"—which breaks the weird, nocturnal silence of a dense forest in the prologue to *Anandamath* must have stirred again and again at the hearts of the young revolutionaries who took to the dangerous path for the sake of their country and faced the dire consequences.

These secret revolutionary activities were not confined to Bengal, they spread to various other parts of the country. The Bengal revolutionaries themselves moved out to several other provinces, while there were independent revolutionary societies in many of those places, like the *Abhinava Bharat* of Savarkar. How revolutionary activities were carried on from outside India is also well-known. It is important to notice that Madan Lal Dhingra, an Indian student who killed Curzon-Wyllie, Political Aide-de-Camp to the Secretary of State for India, in London and was sentenced to death, died with *Vande Mataram* on his lips.

What could have been Bankim's reaction to all this, were he alive? Whether he would have or would not have approved of this terroristic use of some of his works is a matter for speculation. But to understand this point it is necessary to refer to Bankim's theory of force in some detail. Bankim never ruled out force from statecraft, nor was he a believer in unalloyed non-violence. For instance he would not consider war immoral or unjust if it were for the defence of the country\*. He also stressed the need of physical training and fitness. Prafulla, for instance, has to undergo rigid physical training to become *Devi Chaudhurani*. In *Krishnacharitra* he expounds the theory—of course in relation to Krishna's Message—that all violence is not necessarily a sin and that the application of force is fully justified where meant to counter unrighteous violence.\*\* In this way he seeks to strike a balance between unqualified *Ahimsa* and the practical needs of the society.

But he never justifies the use of force for power-lust or self-aggrandisement. Force must be used, if at all, for the sake of *Dharma* which means

\* *Dharmatattwa*, Chapters 8 & 13

\*\* *Krishnacharitra*, Part VI, Chapter 6

the good of the people In both *Anandamath* and *Devi Chaudhurani*, force, used as the principal *modus operandi*, stands ultimately much depreciated when the Doctor says that bad means cannot achieve good ends and Devi refuses to continue to be a dacoit queen, opting for the simple pleasures of a household life. The fact is that, while not denying the necessity of force under certain circumstances, Bankim never believed in it as the only or even the principal means of righting wrongs and considered physical force inferior to intellectual force or enlightened public opinion Bankim envisaged a moral society based on the welfare ideal where physical force is not altogether ruled out but where enlightened public opinion regulates human relations Bankim never justified bad means for good ends, he wanted human character to be properly moulded through education and enlightenment for the achievement of the great tasks of life And this is the basic tenet of a democratic order of things He was essentially a constructive thinker He never intended his works to be a food for momentary excitement or sudden outburst of violence He wanted his ideas to seep down deep into the nation's psyche and build its moral stamina, so that it could be worthy of itself He did not believe that sudden fits of anger or excitement, violent or non-violent, could solve, basically, the problems of the nation A correct reading of his message would show that it is far more fundamental than supplying inspiration to passing phases of revolutionary wrath

Thus ends the life story of a man whose immensely powerful personality made a great impact on literature and life in India Though an artist, first and foremost, Bankim chose the difficult path of nation-building, and the choice for him was a matter of inner compulsion Thus he brought to his countrymen a new gospel only vaguely heard till then To the nascent nationalism of the country he sought to impart strength and dignity and constructive orientation He upbraided people for their ignorance, indifference and superstition He rebuked them for their slavish Western imitation He taught them to feel proud of the nation and national culture He inspired them with the message of nationalism And to that nationalism he sought to give a new direction and purpose



# Appendix I

## VANDE MATARAM

(Translation in verse)

Mother, I bow to thee !  
Rich with thy hurrying streams,  
Bright with thy orchard gleams,  
Cool with thy winds of delight,  
Dark fields waving, Mother of might,  
Mother free

Glory of moonlight dreams,  
Over thy branches and lordly streams,  
Clad in thy blossoming trees,  
Mother, giver of ease,  
Laughing low and sweet !  
Mother, I kiss thy feet,  
Speaker sweet and low !  
Mother, to thee I bow.

Who hath said thou art weak in thy lands,  
When the swords flash out in twice  
seventy million hands.

And seventy million voices roar  
Thy dreadful name from shore to shore ?  
With many strengths who art mighty and stored,  
To thee I call, Mother and Lord !  
Thou who savest, arise and save !  
To her I cry who ever her foemen drave  
Back from plain and sea  
And shook herself free  
Thou art wisdom, thou art law,  
Thou our heart, our soul, our breath,  
Thou the love divine, the awe  
In our hearts that conquers death



sweet of laughter, sweet of speech,  
the Mother, giver of boons, giver of bliss !  
Terrible with the clamorous shout of  
seventy million throats,  
and the sharpness of swords raised in twice  
seventy million hands,  
Who sayeth to thee, Mother, that thou art  
weak ?  
Holder of multitudinous strength,  
I bow to her who saves,  
to her who drives from her the armies of her  
foemen,  
the Mother !  
Thou art knowledge, thou art conduct,  
thou our heart, thou our soul,  
for thou art the life in our body.  
In the arm thou art might, O Mother,  
in the heart, O Mother, thou art love and  
faith,  
it is thy image we raise in every temple  
For thou art Durga holding her ten weapons  
of war,  
Kamala at play in the lotuses  
and Speech, the goddess, giver of all lore,  
to thee I bow !  
I bow to thee, goddess of wealth,  
pure and peerless,  
richly-watered, richly-fruited,  
the Mother !  
I bow to thee, Mother,  
dark-hued, candid,  
sweetly smiling, jewelled and adorned,  
the holder of wealth, the lady of plenty,  
the Mother !

(from *BANKIM-TILAK-DAYANANDA*  
by Sri Aurobindo)



## VANDE MATARAM

(Original Bengali in Devanagari Script)

वन्दे मातरम् ।

सुजलां सुफलां मलयजशीतलाम्

शस्यश्यामलां मातरम् ।

शुभ्र-ज्योत्स्ना-पुलकित-यामिनीम्

फुल्लकुसुमित-द्रुमदलशोभिनीम्,

सुहासिनी सुमधुरभाषिणीम्

सुखदा वरदा मातरम् ॥

सप्तकोटीकण्ठ-कल-कल-निनादकराले,

द्विसप्तकोटीभुजैर्धृतखरकरवाले,

अबला केन मा एत बले !

बहुबलधारिणी नमामि तारिणी

रिपुदलवारिणी मातरम् ।

तुमि विद्या तुमि धर्म

तुमि हृदि तुमि मर्म

त्व हि प्राणा शरीरे ।

बाहुते तुमि मा शक्ति,

हृदये तुमि मा भक्ति,

तोमारइ प्रतिमा गडि

मन्दिरे मन्दिरे ।

त्वं हि दुर्गा दशप्रहरणधारिणी

कमला कमल-दलविहारिणी

वाणी विद्यादायिनी नमामि त्वां

नमामि कमलाम् अमलां अतुलाम्

सुजला सुफला मातरम्

वन्दे मातरम्

श्यामला सरला सुस्मिता भूषिताम्

धरणी भरणी मातरम् ।

—बकिसचन्द्र

(from ANANDAMATH)

## Appendix II

### A chronology of Bankim Chandra Chatterji's life and works

- 1838 Birth at Kanthalpara on June 26.
- 1844 Entered an English school at Midnapore, the place of his father's posting
- 1849 Returned to Kanthalpara. First marriage. Entered Hooghly College.
- 1852 Started writing for the *Sambad Prabhakar*.
- 1853 Won a cash award in a poetry competition on the pages of the *Sambad Prabhakar*.
- 1854 Obtained scholarship of Rs 8 at the Junior Scholarship Examination for 1853
- 1856 Obtained scholarship of Rs 20 for the highest proficiency in all subjects at the Senior Scholarship Examination. *Lahita Purakalk Galpa Tatha Manas* (written in 1853) published. Entered the Presidency College of Calcutta to study Law
- 1857 Passed the Entrance Examination of the Calcutta University in the first division
- 1858 Passed the B A. Examination. Appointed Deputy Magistrate and Deputy Collector and posted in Jessore.
- 1859 Death of his wife.
- 1860 Transferred to Neguan Married Rajlakshmi Devi. Promoted to class five rank and had a pay rise. Transferred to Khulna.
- 1863 Promoted to class four rank and had another pay rise.
- 1864 Bankim's English novel *Rajmohan's Wife* serialized in the journal *Indian Field*. Transferred to Baruipur where he stayed on till 1869 except for brief spells
- 1865 Publications : *Durgeshnandini*.
- 1866 Promoted to class three rank with a pay rise. Publications : *Kapalkundala*.
- 1867 Appointed Secretary to a Commission for determining the salary scales of the ministerial employees

- 1869 Passed the B.L. (Law) Examination. Transferred to Behrampur. Wrote an essay in English, namely, *On the Origin of the Hindu Festivals* which was read before the Bengal Social Science Association. Publications : *Mrinalini*.
- 1870 Wrote an essay in English entitled *A Popular Literature for Bengal* which was read before the Bengal Social Science Association. Promoted to class two rank Mother's death.
- 1871 Temporary Personal Assistant to the Commissioner, Rajshahi Division Two articles in English, namely, *Bengali Literature and Buddhism and the Sankhya Philosophy*, appearing anonymously in the *Calcutta Review*, are known to have been written by Bankim
- 1872 *Bangadarshan* started appearing under Bankim's editorship. Many of his important works, fiction and non-fiction, began to be published on the pages of *Bangadarshan* An essay in English entitled *The Confessions of a Young Bengali*, appearing in *Mukherji's Magazine*, is believed to have been written anonymously by Bankim.
- 1873 Wrote *The Study of Hindu Philosophy* for *Mukherji's Magazine*. Quarrel with Col. Duffin Publications : *Bishabriksha* and *Indira*
- 1874 Posted at Barasat and for a brief spell at Maldah. Publications : *Yugalanguriya* and *Lok Rahasya*.
- 1875 Took long leave Publications : *Vynan Rahasya*, *Chandra-shekhar* and *Kamalakanter Daptar*.
- 1876 Transferred to Hooghly. *Bangadarshan* stopped publication. Publications : *Vividha Samalochana*.
- 1877 Set up household in Hooghly. *Bangadarshan* reappeared under Sanjib Chandra's editorship Publications : *Rajani* and *Upakatha* (comprising *Indira*, *Yugalanguriya* and *Radharani*). Wrote the life of Dinabandhu Mitra in a foreword to his collected works
- 1878 Publications : *Kabita Pustak* and *Krishnakanter Will*.
- 1879 Publications : *Prabandha Pustak* and *Samya*
- 1880 Appointed Personal Assistant to the Commissioner, Burdwan Division

- 1881 Transferred to Howrah. Father's death. Quarrel with Collector Buckland Posted in Calcutta as temporary Assistant Secretary to the Government of Bengal
- 1882 Moved to Alipore as Deputy Magistrate and Deputy Collector, to Barasat, to Alipore again and finally to Jajpore (Cuttack). At Calcutta Bankim had frequent discussions about Hindu religion with friends including positivist Jogen-dra Chandra Ghosh to whom his *Letters on Hinduism* is believed to have been addressed. Controversy with Rev. Hastie Publications: *Rajsinha* (first version) and *Anandamath*.
- 1883 Transferred to Howrah Quarrel with Collector Westmacott.
- 1884 Sponsored a monthly magazine called *Prachar* on the pages of which were gradually serialized, apart from *Sitaram*, his *Krishnacharitra*, essays on Hinduism and Hindu gods and goddesses known as *Devatattwa O Hindu Dharma* and his incomplete treatise on *Srimadbhagavadgita*. *Navajwan* carried his essays on religion later forming part of *Dharmatattwa*. Controversy with Adi Brahmo Samaj leaders Promoted to class one rank at Howrah Publications: *Muchram Gurer Jwan Charit* and *Dev Chaudhuram*
- 1885 Moved to Jhenidah Appointed Fellow of the Calcutta University Senate Edited Ishwar Gupta's poems with an introductory essay. Publications: *Kamalakanta* (incorporating *Kamalakanter Daptar*.)
- 1886 Posted at Bhadrak (Orissa) and then at Howrah Publications: *Kshudra Kshudra Upanyas* (comprising *Indira*, *Yugalanguriya*, *Radharam* and *Rajsinha*), *Radharam* and *Krishnacharitra* (Part I)
- 1887 Purchased a house in Calcutta Posted in Midnapore Publications: *Sitaram* and *Vividha Prabandha* (Part I)
- 1888 Transferred to Alipore, his last posting Differences with Collector Baker Publications: *Dharmatattwa* (*pratham bhag—first part*) *Anushulan*
- 1891 Retired prematurely from service in September Became President of the Literary Section of the Society for the Higher Training of Young Men, later known as the University Institute Publications: *Gadya Padya Ba Kabita Pustak*

- 1892 Edited *Bengali Selections* for the Entrance Examination of the Calcutta University. Wrote a foreword to Peary Chand Mitra's works. Awarded the title of Rai Bahadur. Publications : *Vividha Prabandha II* and *Krishnacharitra* (revised and enlarged).
- 1893 Edited Sanjib Chandra's works. Publications : *Rajsinha* (revised and enlarged)
- 1894 Awarded the C I E title Delivered two lectures on Vedic literature at the Society for the Higher Training of Young Men.
- In March the diabetes he had been suffering from took a serious turn. Died on April 8

# Appendix III

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